

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



March 2014

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *I and You*

WITHOUT the “I” there can be no “you” outside. From this some philosophers came to the conclusion that the external world did not exist save in the subject; that the “you” existed only in the “I”. Others have argued that the “I” can only be known through the “you” and with equal logic. These two views are partial truths, each wrong in part and each right in part. Thought is as much material and as much in nature as body is. Both matter and mind exist in a third, a unity which divides itself into the two. This unity is the Atman, the real Self.

There is being, “x”, which is manifesting itself as both mind and matter. Its movements in the seen are along certain fixed lines called law. As a unity, it is free; as many, it is bound by law. Still, with all this bondage, an idea of freedom is ever present, and this is Nivritti, or the “dragging from attachment”. The materialising forces which through desire lead us to take an active part in worldly affairs are called Pravritti.

That action is moral which frees us from the bondage of matter and vice versa. This world appears infinite, because everything is in a circle; it returns to whence it came. The circle meets, so there is no rest or peace here in any place. We must get out. Mukti is the one end to be attained.

Evil changes in form but remains the same in quality. In ancient times force ruled, today it is cunning. Misery in India is not so



bad as in America, because the poor man here sees the greater contrast to his own bad condition.

God is the abstract compound of all that is merciful and good and helpful; that should be the sole idea. As Atman, we have no body; so to say, “I am God, and poison does not hurt me”, is an absurdity. While there is a body and we see it, we have not realised God. Can the little whirlpool remain after the river vanishes? Cry for help, and you will get it; and at last you will find that the one crying for help has vanished, and so has the Helper, and the play is over; only the Self remains.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 7.104–107.

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This is the Hindi version of the English Film 'Vivekananda by Vivekananda' which was released in January 2012 and the same was well received by devotees, admirers of Swamiji, and general public.

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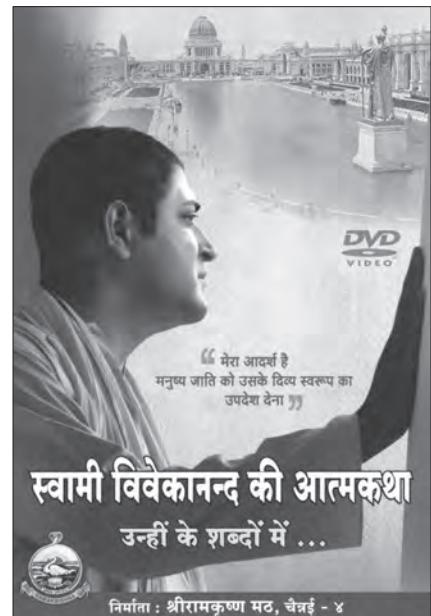
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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Emergent Behaviour of Life

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इमाः सोम्य नद्यः पुरस्तात्प्राच्यः स्यन्दन्ते पश्चात्प्रतीच्यस्ताः समुद्रात्समुद्रमेवापियन्ति
स समुद्रं एव भवति ता यथा तत्र न विदुरियमहमस्मीयमहमस्मीति ॥
एवमेव खलु सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सत आगम्य न विदुः सत आगच्छामह इति
त इह व्याग्रो वा सिंहो वा वृक्षो वा वराहो वा कीटो वा पतङ्गो वा दंशो वा
मशको वा यद्यद्भवन्ति तदाभवन्ति ॥

O good-looking one, these eastward rivers flow to the East, and the westward rivers flow to the West; (they rise) from the sea and merge in the sea itself; they become one with the sea. As they do not realize there, 'I am this (river)', 'I am this (river)', in this very way indeed, O good-looking one, all these creatures having come from Existence, do not realize, 'We have come from Existence'. Whichever creatures they were here (in this world)—whether tiger, lion, wolf, pig, insect, grasshopper, gadfly, or mosquito—they become that.

(Chhandogya Upanishad, 6.10.1-2)

स यथा सैन्धवखिल्य उदके प्रास्त उदकमेवानुविलीयेत न हास्योद्ग्रहणायेव स्यात्
यतो यतस्त्वाददीत लवणमेव एवं वा अर इदं महद्भूतमनन्तमपारं विज्ञानघन एव ।
एतेभ्यो भूतेभ्यः समुत्थाय तान्येवानु विनश्यति न प्रेत्य संज्ञास्तीत्यरे ब्रवीमीति
होवाच याज्ञवल्क्यः ॥

As a lump of salt dropped into water dissolves with (its component) water, and no one is able to pick it up, but from wheresoever one takes it, it tastes salt, even so, my dear, this great, endless, infinite Reality is but pure Intelligence. (The self) comes out (as a separate entity) from these elements, and (this separateness) is destroyed with them. After attaining (this oneness) it has no more (particular) consciousness. This is what I say, my dear (Maitreyi). So said Yajnavalkya.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.4.12)

THIS MONTH

Vedanta as a philosophy and a religion has influenced all aspects of life in India since ancient times. A new dimension of Vedanta has opened up with Swami Vivekananda's interpretation, which will be **Vedanta for the New Age**.



There are many arguments for and against God's existence. Both sides have some valid and some puerile arguments. Arun Chatterjee, Professor Emeritus, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA, presents **Philosophy of God According to Vedanta**.

One of the reasons Vedanta is influential is its syncretic nature. Brahmachari Suvimalachaitanya of Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, writes about **Vedanta's Syncretism**.

After 150 years Swamiji's ideas are being studied by nearly all disciplines and discourses. The **Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta** takes an overview of Swamiji's influence. Dr M Sivaramkrishna is former Head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Imagination is a powerful faculty of the human mind. Amarendra Srivastava, a software engineer from Bengaluru, presents how we can employ its power by **Imagining the Real**.



In Vivekananda: The Prophet of New India, S Srinivasachar, retired Professor of History, Maharaja College, Mysore, explores how Swamiji brought about a renaissance in India.



What **Life and Death** is has perplexed and mystified humankind. Prof. Kaulir Kisor Chatterjee, former Chief Mineral Economist, Indian Bureau of Mines, from Nagpur, writes from the cosmic perspective.

In the concluding part of **Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: Two Teachings or One?** Arpita Mitra, PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, shows how the teachings of the two world teachers match at every step.



In the sixteenth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda explains how the ego and inner doubts destroy spiritual life, which, however, can be saved by the guru's grace. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published from Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

Vedanta for the Modern Age

THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION of Vedanta, since the Upanishadic age, has played a major role in moulding people's spiritual consciousness. The time is coming for Advaita Vedanta to play a central role in moulding the future of humanity. Vedanta is finding new areas to take root, as all sciences are leading us to the concept of 'the unity of all life and matter', besides daringly studying the field of consciousness. Moreover, formal religions are giving way to irreligion and iconoclasm. Swami Vivekananda says: 'It [Vedanta] comes whenever religion seems to disappear and irreligion seems to prevail, and that is why it has taken ground in Europe and America.' Swamiji describes how it saved India twice in the past: 'Buddha brought the Vedanta to light, gave it to the people, and saved India. A thousand years after his death a similar state of things again prevailed. The mobs, the masses, and various races, had been converted to Buddhism; naturally the teachings of the Buddha became in time degenerated, because most of the people were very ignorant. Buddhism taught no God, no ruler of the universe, so gradually the masses brought their gods, and devils, and hobgoblins out again, and a tremendous hotchpotch was made of Buddhism in India. Again materialism came to the fore, taking the form of licence with the higher classes and superstition with the lower. Then Shankaracharya arose and once more revivified the Vedanta philosophy. He made it a rationalistic philosophy. ... By Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon, and

by Shankaracharya, the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of Advaita.'

There are various schools and sub-schools of Vedanta apart from the popular Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita. Swamiji says that Vedanta covers 'the whole ground of Indian religious life', whatever be the philosophy or sect. This is because sages and saints have applied its fundamental principles to newer grounds according to the need of the various ages and stages of human development. In this age Swamiji came and made Vedanta practical, as this was the growing need of the age. He absorbed the various material sciences and made Vedanta reach all people in whatever condition they may be.

Swamiji's interpretation of Vedanta demands a tremendous sense of responsibility to make this philosophy practical—it can be called 'responsible' Vedanta. Ordinary people lack a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to anything, that is why Vedanta appears so distant and difficult. Even those who take up Vedanta, the elite among monks and pundits, have been preaching it to others by saying that the world is maya, instead of practising this principle themselves. It reminds one of the sadhu who came to Dakshineshwar and talked big Vedanta but never bothered to harmonize his actions according to his teachings. One day Sri Ramakrishna accosted him and demanded an explanation. As usual the sadhu said that if everything is unreal, then his actions too were unreal. To this kind of irresponsibility Sri

Ramakrishna said that he would spit on such understanding of Vedanta.

One must have a tremendous sense of responsibility, above all for one's actions, in order that the results of karma do not make one miserable. We think and do things casually, causing harm to others—like speaking lies and behaving corruptly—and then acknowledge that we are unhappy. Such unhappy people go to temples, therapists, and travels everywhere as an antidote or to simply lull themselves into the idea that everyone is unhappy. The scriptures say that the result of good karma is happiness and bad karma brings misery and unhappiness.

Next we must become responsible for those around us—family, relatives, and friends. Making them happy makes one happy. In his *Karma Yoga*, Swamiji quotes from the Smritis a long list of duties to be performed by householders, while also delineating one's responsibilities towards society. As we have been nurtured in it, we have to contribute to society so that it can nurture future generations. In this global age we must be responsible also towards the environment, as it affects everyone near us as well as others across the globe.

We are responsible for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the earth we trod on, the food we eat. This sense of responsibility should grow with our increasing knowledge of the universe. Simply saying humankind is superior will not do any good. We must be able to now prove this superiority to ourselves and to the millions of other species for whom we are really responsible. Vedanta demands such a high responsibility that calls for the highest sacrifice. Fast disappearing are the days when one would stand in front of a deity with gifts, praying for oneself. Vedanta would make one pray for all of creation, constantly.

Only such responsible persons can become Vedantists in the truest sense. Advaita Vedanta

speaks of an impersonal Reality, but this impersonal Reality includes all personalities—from Ishvara down to a blade of grass. Vedanta also preaches a known God, who comprises all the forms of the living and the non-living we see around. Swamiji says that Vedanta 'does not teach anything unknown, but in the language of the Upanishad, "The God whom you worship as an unknown God, the same I preach unto thee." It is through the Self that you know anything. ... It is in and through the Self that you are known to me, that the whole world is known to me; and therefore to say this Self is unknown is sheer nonsense.' This is practical Vedanta. We can no longer look down upon at the weak and those who have had no opportunities to manifest their Divinity. Swamiji went even further and said that we should not even sneer at a streetwalker 'whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women!' This idea of the balance of nature's law has been emphasized by Swamiji.

Everything in the world affects us, and we affect everything. This reality is however shut down by the ego. It narrows our view of ourselves and the world around; that is the reason why we do not love or identify with others. Those who want to be Vedantists must renounce this 'raw' ego and develop a 'ripe' ego as Sri Ramakrishna used to say.

It is true that it is hard to be a true Vedantist, but the future humanity is travelling towards it. We need to be ready and practise it in order that future generations will find it easier. This is the responsibility for each and every one of us: to spread Vedanta and make it living for us and for future humanity. The other method is by understanding that this philosophy and religion of Vedanta is not in books or anywhere outside but in every heart. It is our real nature waiting to become manifest.

Philosophy of God According to Vedanta

Prof. Arun Chatterjee

THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY people, especially philosophers and theologians, have wondered about the nature and source of the world. This source is commonly conceptualized as a Supreme Being and referred to as God. There are also those who believe that this source is an impersonal Reality. Generally, people in all cultures believe in God, although their concepts are not alike, and philosophers have debated this issue for thousands of years. To support their stand, believers in God offer proofs usually known as ontological, cosmological, and teleological.

Indian philosophers, too, have, intensely debated these issues, and as a result there came to be various shades of views. Buddhism, Jainism, Charvaka, and the old Samkhya do not believe in God. Other schools stand midway, such as the Yoga philosophy, while the rest are settled theists. Some schools dismiss not just God but also the world. Most Indian schools of philosophy, however, believe in God either as impersonal, devoid of qualities, or personal, with qualities. Some schools accept both the impersonal and personal aspects of God.

This article will not deal with the proofs in favour or against the existence of God. It will begin with the premise that God, either impersonal or personal, exists, and will focus on the relation of God with the world and individuals living in it. Two specific issues will be examined: (i) whether God is impersonal or personal, responding to prayers and aspirations of individuals; and (ii) God's transcendence and immanence with respect to the manifested world. I will also examine the implications of

different views on spiritual practices. Among Indian philosophies I will discuss the views of three prominent schools of Vedanta philosophy: Acharya Shankara's Advaita, Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita, and Madhva's Dvaita. I will present some of the key statements and verses from the Upanishads and Bhagavadgita related to these issues along with the views of Sri Ramakrishna and two contemporary scholars of Vedanta: Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

Schools of Vedanta

The source literature of Vedanta philosophy includes the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*, also known as *Vedanta Sutra*. The Upanishads are the spiritual experiences of the rishis. These teachings are not written systematically and the mantras are not always easy to understand. The *Brahma Sutra* is meant to provide a systematic explanation of the Upanishads, but these are written in such a cryptic form that one has to rely on scholars' interpretations. The Gita presents a very comprehensive and clear explanation of various philosophical concepts, and Swami Vivekananda as well as Sri Aurobindo had a high respect for this scripture.

The three great commentators—Acharya Shankara (788–820), Ramanujacharya (1055–1137), and Madhvacharya (1299–78)—who interpreted the *Brahma Sutra*, established different schools of Vedanta. These acharyas came up with different views on some fundamental issues. Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya were very much aware of Acharya Shankara's interpretation and views and did not accept some of

them. Later there have been vigorous debates among their disciples and other scholars on these different views of Vedanta.

All schools of Vedanta recognize that the ultimate Reality, the source of the phenomenal world, is Brahman. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: 'Verily, in the beginning this (world) was the one only Brahman.'¹ However, there is some disagreement among these schools over the question whether Brahman is *saguna*, with qualities; *nirguna*, without qualities; or both. This issue is closely related to that of the personal and impersonal aspects of Brahman, and I will treat both these issues simultaneously. Another question is that if Brahman is *nirguna* as well as *saguna*, then which of the two is more important? In brief, it can be said that Acharya Shankara recognizes both *nirguna* and *saguna*, but emphasizes the *nirguna* aspect. Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita recognize only the *saguna* aspect.

In Acharya Shankara's metaphysical scheme Nirguna Brahman is impersonal and devoid of qualities. It is self-existent, immutable, beyond causality and relativity, and is undifferentiated Consciousness. Saguna Brahman, which is Ishvara or God, is related to the manifested world and has qualities and personality. Ishvara is the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman. Ishvara in Advaita Vedanta is somewhat problematic and tenuous. According to Acharya Shankara, Brahman is the only Reality in the ultimate sense. His view of Ishvara is explained by scholars in different ways. Some think that for Acharya Shankara Brahman reflected in or conditioned by maya is Ishvara. Some others think that Acharya Shankara preferred to view Ishvara as the *vivarta*, appearance, of Brahman. In any case the agent causing the reflection or appearance is maya, which is the inscrutable power of Brahman. Maya is interpreted by some scholars as the power that creates the illusion of

the world, and according to that interpretation Ishvara along with the world is unreal.

I would like to point out that although in Advaita philosophy Brahman has the supreme status, *paramarthaikasatta*, Ishvara's role is not utterly discarded. Acharya Shankara did acknowledge the reality of Ishvara, but Ishvara's reality is practical reality, *vyavaharikasatta*. And when the *ajnana*, ignorance, of a jiva is removed and one attains Brahman, one no longer has a need for Ishvara.

According to Ramanuja, there cannot be any undifferentiated impersonal Reality—like the Nirguna Brahman of Acharya Shankara's philosophy—and for him the ultimate Reality is Saguna Brahman. Thus Ishvara is Saguna Brahman with innumerable qualities, which include knowledge, power, compassion, and so on. The universe and jivas represent the body of Saguna Brahman, which is *vishishta*, qualified, by matter and individual souls. The world of matter and souls are mutable and undergo changes, but Ishvara remains unchanged. Ramanuja's God is represented by and worshipped as Vishnu, whose consort is Lakshmi. Ramanuja emphasized devotion to Vishnu and Lakshmi as the primary way of approaching God.

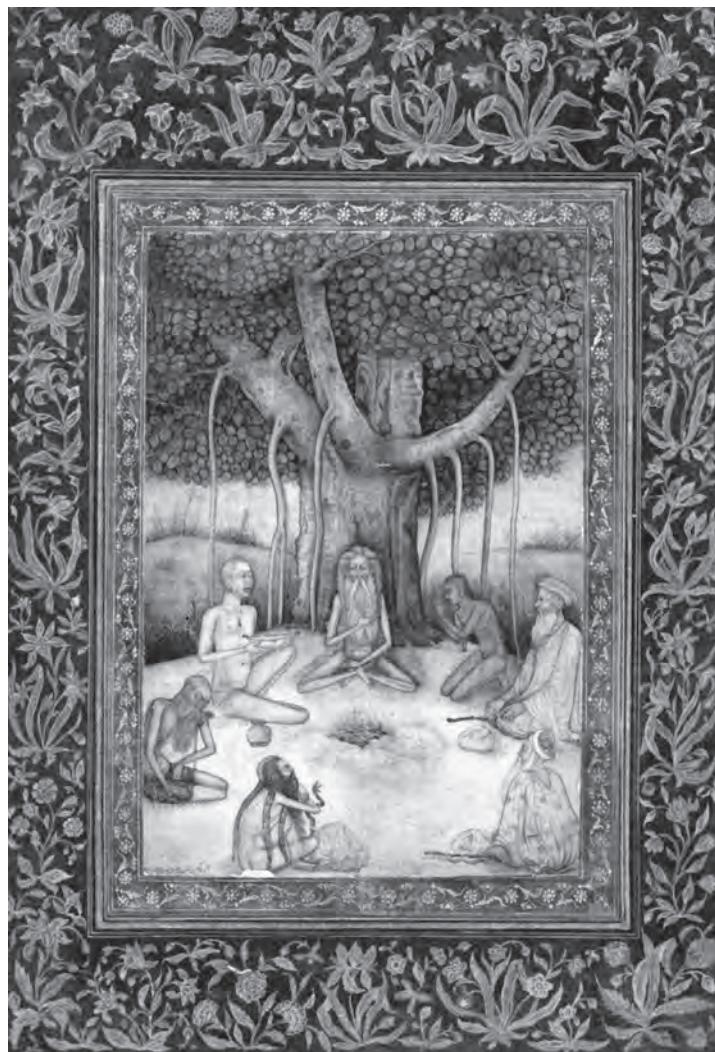
Madhva's concept of God has similarities with that of Ramanuja's, but there is a fundamental difference as well. Madhva also rejected Acharya Shankara's concept of Nirguna Brahman and agreed with Ramanuja that Brahman is *saguna* and is Vishnu. However, Ramanuja believed that despite the fact that matter and jivas are different from God, they are constituted by God's essence. On the other hand, Madhva was a pluralist and believed that the world of matter and souls are made of different substances. Nevertheless, according to Madhva, matter and jivas are entirely dependent on God, and bhakti towards God is the only way for liberation from samsara.

What do the Upanishads and the Gita Say?

Saguna Brahman is referred to as *isha* or Ishvara in the Upanishads and the Gita. Ishvara is Prabhu, the Lord of the world, who possesses innumerable qualities, *anantaguni*. In the Upanishads Brahman has been referred to as *nirguna* as well as *guni*, possessor of qualities. For example, the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* describes God as *guni*, possessor of qualities,² whereas another verse describes him as *nirguna*, devoid of qualities (6.11). In the Gita as well the Supreme Person has been described as ‘*nirgunam gunabhoktri cha*; free from qualities yet enjoyer of qualities’.³ The concept of the impersonal Brahman dominated the early Upanishads, but reference to the Personal God can be found in later Upanishads such as the *Isha*, *Katha*, and *Shvetashvatara*. The *Katha Upanishad* says: ‘The Unmanifest is higher than Mahat; the Purusha is higher than the Unmanifest. There is nothing higher than Purusha. He is the culmination; he is the highest goal.’⁴ The concept of the personal God is quite prominent in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* and the Gita. In the Gita bhakti towards God is emphasized.

It is important to note that the Personal God of the Upanishads and the Gita is the Godhead, and not the limited personal gods commonly worshipped by many. In the Gita Sri Krishna says: ‘I am the origin of the gods.’⁵ Sri Aurobindo explains that ‘this Godhead is not a particularised name and form of Divinity, *isṭa-devatā*, constructed by the intelligence or embodying the special aspiration of the worshipper. All such

names and forms are only powers and faces of the one Deva who is the universal Lord of all worshippers and all religions: but this is itself that universal Deity, *deva-deva*.⁶ The Gita recognizes the Purushottama, Supreme Person: ‘Since I am transcendental to the mutable and higher even than the immutable, hence I am well known in the world and in the Vedas as the supreme Purusha.’⁷ Throughout the Gita Sri Krishna refers to himself as the Purushottama and in a shloka says: ‘*Mattah parataram nanyat-kinchid-asti*; there is nothing else whatsoever higher than myself’ (7.7). There should not be any controversy as to the meaning of this statement, as according



to the Gita the highest Reality is Purushottama, who is not Nirguna Brahman.

God's transcendence and immanence with respect to the world and living beings have been accepted by all schools of Vedanta, although there is a difference in the manner of immanence.

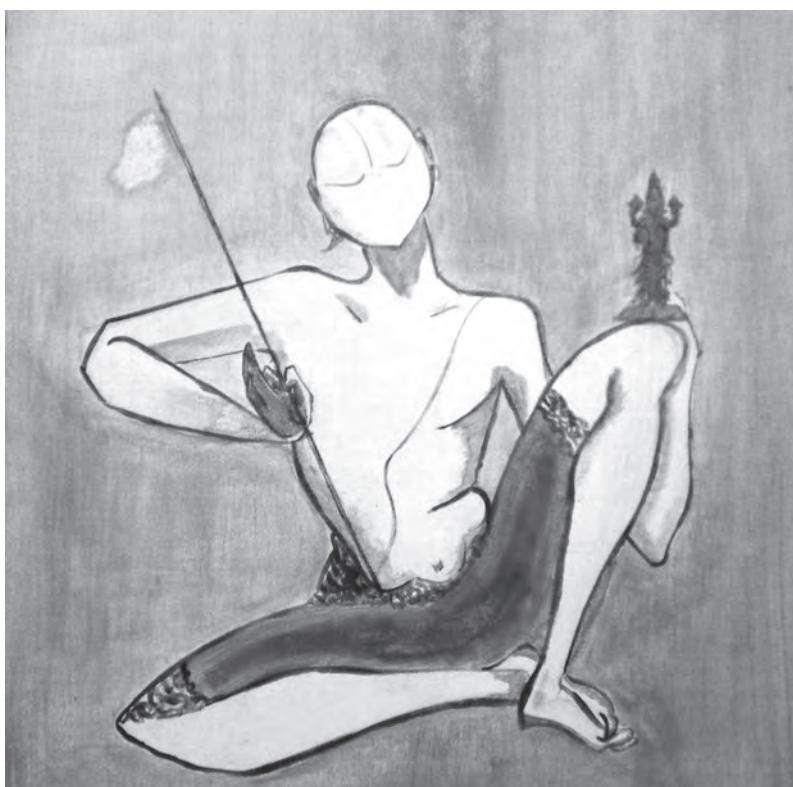
The Upanishads and the Gita often present the concept of transcendence simultaneously with that of immanence. For example: 'Now, that Light that shines above this heaven, beyond the whole creation, beyond everything, in the highest worlds, which are surpassingly good, it is certainly this that is the light within a person.'⁸ Similarly: 'That moves, that does not move; that is far off, that is very near; that is inside all this, and that is also outside all this.'⁹

The personal form of Brahman, Ishvara or God, and his transcendence is also recognized in the Upanishads and the Gita. 'The Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. Encompassing the universe from all sides,

he extends beyond it by ten fingers' breadth.'¹⁰ The verse clearly indicates that although Ishvara has manifested himself in the world, he also transcends it. In the Gita Sri Krishna says: 'This whole world is pervaded by me in my unmanifest form. All beings exist in me, but I am not contained in them.'¹¹ Thus these are some of the representative verses that speak of and confirm the transcendence and immanence of God in the Upanishads and the Gita.

Having briefly reviewed some key statements, let us examine the views of the three schools of Vedanta—Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita. All three schools recognize the transcendent status of Brahman either in *nirguna* or *saguna* form. The immanence of God in the world also is accepted by the three schools, though the basis of immanence is different for Dvaita. Both Advaita and Vishishtadvaita schools believe that there is only one Reality, which has appeared or manifested as the world and the jivas. This Reality

is Atman, which is Brahman itself. There is a difference, however, between Acharya Shankara's and Ramanuja's views as to how the world of matter and souls are related to God. Shankara believed in the complete identity of the world and souls with Brahman, while Ramanuja believed in identity-in-difference. According to Shankara, when ignorance is removed the jivas disappear by merging into Brahman. Ramanuja believed that matter and jivas are real and eternal and not identical to God. However, matter and souls are intimately and inseparably connected to God; they represent



God's body. God is the soul of Nature—matter—and also the Soul of individual souls. For Ramanuja matter and souls are *prakara*, modes, of God's *prakari*, substance. The relation of God, matter, and souls according to Ramanuja is: 'He [Ishvara] is the immanent inner controller, the Supreme Real who holds together in unity the dependent matter and individual souls as His body.'¹² Despite the differences, both Advaita and Vishishtadvaita agree that God is immanent in the world and is the efficient as well as the material cause of the manifested world.

Madhva did not accept the position of those two schools. His view is known for its realism, pluralism, and difference. He believed that God, matter, and souls are real, and that they are constituted by different substances. Although Madhva's philosophy is called Dvaita, dualism, it is actually pluralistic, as he believed that every animate being and inanimate object of the world has its own substance and uniqueness. This philosophy is famous for its concept of fivefold substantive differences between (i) God and soul, (ii) God and matter, (iii) soul and matter, (iv) soul and soul, and (v) matter and matter. Madhva believed in both the transcendence and immanence of God. Whereas the transcendence of God is strongly emphasized in Madhva's philosophy, the immanence of God in the world is not that obvious. He did believe in the immanence of God, but not in terms of substance or essence. Madhva believed that God alone is independent, while souls and matter are absolutely dependent on him despite their uniqueness and differences. God has complete control on Prakriti and souls. It is in accord with God's will that nature evolves various material objects and souls become embodied. God is the efficient cause of the world and souls, but not their material cause. God is the immanent ruler of the world and souls, controlling them from inside.

Views of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo

Many scholars believe that Swami Vivekananda's views are more similar to Shankara's than to those of Ramanuja and Madhva, and there is some truth in that assertion. However, Swamiji had a very broad understanding of Vedanta and acknowledged the validity of all three schools of Vedanta. He was a great admirer of Shankara, and at the same time he also admired Ramanuja and Madhva and acknowledged their contribution to the bhakti movements across India. In many of his lectures he pointed out that all three schools represent Vedanta philosophy. In one of the lectures he said: 'It would be wrong to confine the word Vedanta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upanishads. All these are covered by the word Vedanta. The Vishistadvaitist has as much right to be called a Vedantist as the Advaitist. ... And with my little knowledge, I have come to the conclusion that they do not contradict each other.'¹³ Swamiji also acknowledged that each of the acharyas had certain bias, which is evident in their interpretation of several verses of the Upanishads and the Gita. In one of his lectures he pointed out:

Even the great commentators Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhvacharya had committed mistakes. Each one believed in the Upanishads as the sole authority, but thought that they preached one thing, one path only. Thus Shankaracharya committed the mistake in supposing that the whole of the Upanishads taught one thing, which was Advaitism, and nothing else; and wherever a passage bearing distinctly the Dvaita idea occurred, he twisted and tortured the meaning to make it support his own theory. So with Ramanuja and Madhvacharya when pure Advaitic texts occurred (3. 439).

Swamiji believed that there is some truth in

the views of all three schools of Vedanta and that these views can be reconciled.

Sri Aurobindo believed in the fundamental concept of Advaita, but he was critical of Shankara's view that the world and jivas are ultimately unreal. He agreed fully with Swami Vivekananda that the views of various schools of Vedanta can be verified by experience and can be reconciled. Sri Aurobindo addressed the issue of personality and impersonality of God in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, in which he wrote: 'Personality and impersonality, as our minds understand them, are only aspects of the Divine and both are contained in his being; they are one thing which we see from two opposite sides and into which we enter by two gates.'¹⁴ He further explained that the apparent difference between and opposition of the personal and impersonal forms of God, which appear at the mental level, is reconciled by the power of intuition. In *The Life Divine* he wrote that at a higher level of consciousness one can realize that:

A purely impersonal existence and consciousness is true and possible, but also an entirely personal consciousness and existence; the Impersonal Divine, Nirguna Brahman, and the personal Divine, Saguna Brahman, are here equal and coexistent aspects of the Eternal. Impersonality can manifest with person subordinated to it as a mode of expression; but, equally, Person can be the reality with impersonality as a mode of its nature: both aspects of manifestation face each other in the infinite variety of conscious Existence.¹⁵

The concepts of the personality and impersonality of God and also that of the transcendence and immanence are important for the outlook and practice of spirituality. For those spiritual seekers who concentrate on the transcendent Brahman alone, life in this world does not have any great significance. On the other

hand, for those who concentrate on the immanence of God, this world is full of God's faces and life in the world is meaningful. Swami Vivekananda said: 'We want to worship a living God. I have seen nothing but God all my life, nor have you. To see this chair you first see God and then the chair in and through Him. He is everywhere saying "I am".'¹⁶

The impersonal and personal nature of God has implications for different spiritual paths or yogas, such as those prescribed in the Gita. A follower of jnana yoga tries to reach the transcendent and impersonal Brahman and does not need a personal God. But some jnana yogis accept the personal God along with the devotional approach to God as a preliminary stage, eventually focusing on impersonality. Bhakti yoga, which is very popular, is not possible without a personal God. A karma yogi offers every action and its fruits to God and attenuates the ego, which is replaced by God's will.

As to which path one should follow, that depends on the person's inherent nature. Swami Vivekananda says: 'It has always to be understood that the Personal God worshipped by the Bhakta is not separate or different from the Brahman. All is Brahman, the One without a second; only the Brahman, as unity or absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is, Ishvara, the Supreme Ruler' (3.37). The Gita presents a synthesis of the three paths of knowledge, action, and devotion, and in the Gita's approach there is a role for both the impersonal Brahman and the personal Ishvara.

God is not only an important topic of discussion and debate among philosophers and theologians, the concept of God also plays a vital role in the personal lives of most people. In this article I have examined the major lines of thought about God within the philosophy



of Vedanta, which is very broad and accommodates apparently contradictory conceptions and aspects of God. We must understand that the views of Vedanta were not derived by pure intellectual analysis. Vedanta's views are based on the spiritual experience of the rishis, and although it may be difficult to understand how it is possible for contradictory concepts of God to coexist, the concepts can be verified by spiritual experience, which intellectual philosophers do not rely on. For example, Sri Ramakrishna experienced *nirvikalpa* samadhi, in which he became merged with the impersonal Brahman. He also experienced God in the personal form of Mother Kali, and this Mother of Sri Ramakrishna was neither an illusion nor a reflection of Brahman in maya or *avidya*. Sri Ramakrishna's experience of Mother Kali was as real as it can be. The question of which form of God, impersonal or personal, is superior is irrelevant since both forms are equally valid.



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1. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.11.
2. See *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 6.2 and 6.16.
3. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.14.
4. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.11.
5. *Bhagavadgita*, 10.2.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 2000), 342.
7. *Bhagavadgita*, 15.18.
8. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.13.7.
9. *Isha Upanishad*, 5.
10. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.14.
11. *Bhagavadgita*, 9.4.
12. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1964), 346.
13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 Vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.396.
14. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), 553.
15. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), 281.
16. *Complete Works*, 2.320.

Vedanta's Syncretism

Brahmachari Suvimalachaitanya



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA breathed new life into the difficult and abstruse traditional Advaita Vedanta to make it 'living and poetic'. He could accomplish this because he taught through direct experience. His teachings, as well as those of his guru Sri Ramakrishna, appear living, vivid, and free from the argumentations and disputations that have become the bane of philosophy and religions. These two great souls were destined to transform the world of philosophy, religion, and spirituality. They directly experienced the ultimate Reality called Brahman, one and all-pervading. The manifold objects are the same Brahman but seen by the unenlightened as the world. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'As long as the "I-consciousness" remains, one cannot feel that it is God Himself who has become everything. He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.'¹

Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were endowed with another unique quality: a mighty love and compassion for humankind. This is the reason they accepted every religious viewpoint. They knew how humankind would evolve towards the Truth and therefore did not condemn or berate people; they just worked hard to raise them

higher. Speaking about Sri Ramakrishna, the great historian Will Durant pointed out: 'He tolerated sympathetically the polytheism of the people, and accepted humbly the monism of the philosophers, but in his own living faith God was a spirit incarnated in all men and the only true worship of God was the loving service of mankind.'²

Vedanta's syncretism, as presented by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, harmonized various sects, philosophies, religions, as well as yogas.

Harmony of Vedantic Schools

The advance of science and technology threatens all religions today. In 'Soul, God and Religion' Swamiji gives us a clear picture of the challenges to religions at present:

Under the tremendous sledge-hammer blows of scientific research, old superstitions were crumbling away like masses of porcelain. Those to whom religion meant only a bundle of creeds and meaningless ceremonials were in despair; they were at their wit's end. Everything was slipping between their fingers. For a time it seemed inevitable that the surging tide of agnosticism and materialism would sweep all before it. There were those who did not dare utter what

they thought. Many thought the case hopeless and the cause of religion lost once and for ever.³

All through his life and teachings Swamiji showed that religions can easily face these challenges, if they are based on strong philosophical foundations containing universal principles. This would harmonize their findings with the modern world and science.

In India the philosophical quest for Truth was never divorced from religion. In the ancient philosophical system called Vedanta this quest took diverse forms: Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita, along with their many sub-schools. Swamiji said: 'This Vedanta, the philosophy of the Upanishads, I would make bold to state, has been the first as well as the final thought on the spiritual plane that has ever been vouchsafed to man' (3.322).

And as to how its influence percolates and interpenetrates life in India can be found in the following words of Swamiji:

In India, too, in spite of all these jarring sects that we see today and all those that have been in the past, the one authority, the basis of all these systems, has yet been the Upanishads, the Vedanta. Whether you are a dualist, or a qualified monist, an Advaitist, or a Vishishtadvaitist, a Shuddhadvaitist, or any other Advaitist, or Dvaitist, or whatever you may call yourself, there stand behind you as authority, your Shastras, your scriptures, the Upanishads. Whatever system in India does not obey the Upanishads cannot be called orthodox, and even the systems of the Jains and the Buddhists have been rejected from the soil of India only because they did not bear allegiance to the Upanishads. Thus the Vedanta, whether we know it or not, has penetrated all the sects of India, and what we call Hinduism, this mighty banyan with its immense, almost infinite ramifications, has been throughout interpenetrated by the influence of the Vedanta. Whether we are conscious of it or

not, we think the Vedanta, we live in the Vedanta, we breathe the Vedanta, and we die in the Vedanta, and every Hindu does that' (3.322-3).

The Upanishads declare the eternal Truth in their unique poetical way. Later, as vast and charming philosophical commentaries were written on them, each school subtly manipulated the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sutra* as to appear that each commentator was correct. These schools of thought diverged so much through the centuries that they began to dispute with each other. This age saw a need to harmonize the different schools of Vedanta as well as to put an end to their disputations. It required two great souls in the form of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji to do so. Swamiji, by the blessings of his Master, has become the exponent of Vedanta in modern times, and the very essence of his teachings is the reconciliation he effected among the different schools of philosophy. Swamiji says:

Many times the great sages of yore themselves could not understand the underlying harmony of the Upanishads. Many times, even sages quarrelled, and so much so that at times it became a proverb, that there are no sages who do not differ. But the time requires that a better interpretation should be given to this underlying harmony of the Upanishadic texts; whether they are dualistic, or non-dualistic, quasi-dualistic, or so forth, it has to be shown before the world at large; and this work is required as much in India as outside of India, and I, through the grace of God, had the great fortune to sit at the feet of one whose whole life was such an interpretation, whose life, a thousandfold more than whose teaching, was a living commentary on the texts of the Upanishads, was in fact the spirit of the Upanishads living in human form. Perhaps I have got a little of that harmony; I do not know whether I shall be able to express it or not. But this is my attempt, my mission in life to show that the Vedantic schools are not contradictory,

that they all necessitate each other, all fulfil each other, and one, as it were, is a stepping-stone to the other, until the goal, the Advaita, the Tat Tvam Asi, is reached (3.323-4).

In a letter written in 1894 from the US Swamiji explains how the reconciliation can be brought between dualistic, quasi-dualistic, and non-dualistic texts in the same Upanishads:

The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of the Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shastras (scriptures). He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization. This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations (5.53).

The Upanishads are not systematically written treatises; they are the records of the experiences of the rishis. There is in them an ample scope for the human mind, with its natural variations, to search for the Truth. It was the *Brahma Sutra* that systematized the Upanishadic teachings, but as we have mentioned above, each commentator interpreted it differently. Swamiji says:

It was given to me to live with a man who was as ardent a dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakta, as a Jnani. And living with this man first put it into my head to understand the Upanishads and the texts of the scriptures from an independent and better basis than blindly following the commentators; and in my opinion, and in my researches, I came to the conclusion, that these texts are not all contradictory. So we need have no fear of text-torturing at all! The texts are beautiful, ay, they are most wonderful; and they are not contradictory, but wonderfully harmonious, one idea leading up to the other (3.233).

It is this message of Vedanta and its wonderful harmony—the worship of God from different viewpoints—that Swamiji preached to the world. It was a message for all people, sects, and creeds, for the Vedanta does not constitute a special creed but a spiritual science, forming the basis of all the religious phenomena and experiences of all ages and cultures. Swamiji's message therefore was not a message of conversion from one religion to another, it was a message for the elevation and enlightenment of all, irrespective of their tradition, rituals, or theology. And how Swamiji found the Vedanta to admit of such universal application is briefly explained by him in one of his letters:

All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: The Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India is, Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations (5.81-2). PB

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The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

WE ACCLAIM Vivekananda's appearance at the first ever World Parliament of Religions as the beginning of the unprecedented triumph in establishing Hinduism's legitimate place among world religions. He was described as 'thirty years old in time, ages in civilization'.¹ He was so persuasive and powerful in whatever he spoke that 'you can't trip him up, nor get ahead of him' (*ibid.*). He gave the indelible impression of being 'a thorough student of world history' (1.30). No wonder Harriet Monroe, the founder of *Poetry Magazine*, observed later that his discourses at the Parliament of Religions made 'converts by the score to his hope of uniting East or West in a world religion above the tumult of controversy' (1.86).

Profound and Truly Transforming

Out of the wide variety of audiences he addressed, one of the most deeply moving is Swamiji's visit to the Sherborn Reformatory for Women. 'He went on to compare heartbrokenly the benevolent and rehabilitating treatment of the inmates with the wretched conditions of "the poor, the low, the sinner in India (who) have no friends, no help, (who) cannot rise, try however they may"' (1.25).



Quoting this from Swamiji's letter to Alasinga Perumal, Marie Louise Burke, also known as Sister Gargi, states: 'Perhaps, when Swamiji spoke before the inmates of the Sherborn Reformatory, they thought that *he* was the grandest thing *they* had seen in America. ... One cannot know, but, the young Hindu monk, in his red robe and yellow turban, must have been like a *sunburst* in that dismal prison, and the effect in some cases may have been profound and truly transforming' (*ibid.*).

He spoke at a gathering at Harvard Law School, evoking the atrocities of bigotry and cruelty. Swamiji came down heavily and traced what he called 'the vengeance of history' by saying: 'God will have vengeance ... if you grind down the people, you will suffer. We, in India, are suffering the vengeance of God. ... They [the upper classes] ground down those poor people for their wealth, they heard not the voice of distress, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread' (1.32). What was the impact? 'The little company' gathered there, 'shaken and disturbed by the current of powerful feelings and vindictive passion which seemed to be flowing like molten lava beneath the silent surface of this strange being, broke up, perturbed' (1.33). In the midst of the silence that ensued, Swamiji 'occasionally cast his eye up to the roof and repeated softly, "Shiva, Shiva!"' (Ibid.)—Shiva is the God of *laya*, cosmic dissolution of the universe, hence in tune with the 'violent passion'. Yet Swamiji could be 'wonderfully unspoiled and simple ... claiming nothing for himself, playing with the children, twirling a stick between his fingers with laughing skill and glee at their inability to equal him' (1.36). This he managed alongside passionate denunciation of imperialism, both British and American. In short, Swamiji's indelible power manifest in his versatile personality was making an impact.

Swamiji himself told about 'a great number of men and boys' who pursued him with his strange dress and turban (1.20). He wrote: 'All those rosy ideas we had before starting have melted and I have now to fight against impossibilities. A hundred times I had a mind to go out of the country and go back to India. But I am determined, and I have a call from Above; I see no way, but His eyes see. And I must stick to my guns, life or death' (ibid.). Swamiji stuck to his guns, and history was

made. 'The curio' from India became an abiding celebrity. And what is more significant is that even before the parliament's effect began operating, his advent was described as 'a revival', an effect that assumed profound significance by his appearance at the Parliament of Religions (1.28).

A monk in a yellow turban and red robes is now a remarkable personage at home with all that constitutes human consciousness and creativity. From writing poems to addressing the American Science Association, he had varied themes on which he could speak with authority. The days prior to the parliament reveal the same vitality, resourcefulness, and easy ways of mixing with people.

Sister Gargi puts it succinctly:

Within three weeks Swamiji had, as far as we now know, given eleven lectures and talks. He had, moreover, come into contact with a cross section of American life: he had spoken to the Ramabai Circle; he had met members of the clergy, both friendly and hostile; he had talked to the inmates of a prison, to American club women and even to children; and he had met and gained the respect of some of the leading thinkers and educators of the country. He could not have had a better preparation for all that was to come (1.58).

All that came is now the world's imperishable heritage.

His first address at the Parliament of Religions contains almost all the areas concerned with Hinduism as a universal faith. Even in 1963, during the Birth Centenary of Swamiji, U Thant, the then secretary general of the United Nations, gave a sort of comprehensive description of what kind of synthesis is needed now: 'I feel rather strongly that the exclusive intellectual development without a corresponding moral and spiritual development is sure to lead us from one crisis to another.'² But he also points to a related

'anachronism': 'At the same time, in the middle of the twentieth century, in this space age, a purely moral and spiritual development unaccompanied by corresponding intellectual development is also an anachronism' (*ibid.*). Hence, 'what is necessary' he suggests, 'is a certain kind of synthesis, a certain kind of harmony, a certain harmonizing activity, by which man must be fully integrated' (*ibid.*). In short, intellectual, moral, and spiritual harmony ought to be the desired development model.

In the context of this harmony, U Thant cited what is acutely experienced by us now: 'There is no political tolerance' (306). His hope that there will be political tolerance 'in future' remains an elusive phenomenon—currently there is some political tolerance but not in very significant ways. It is here that he feels the significance of Swamiji: 'This spirit of tolerance, this philosophy of live and let live, this concept of trying to understand the other's point of view, has been what Swami Vivekananda strove to put across—particularly to the American people. I think it is a very great lesson to be learnt from the teachings of Swamiji' (*ibid.*).

There is also the view expressed by Pankaj Mishra in a recent study: 'India's most famous thinker of that century, Swami Vivekananda, who is also 'the earliest and most famous of India's spiritual leaders.'³ I cite this to suggest how Swamiji figures as an inter-text in the studies by authors of divergent views, specially postcolonial. For instance, Pankaj Mishra's book looks at the revolt of the West and the remaking of Asia, which emerged 'from the ruins of the empire' (*ibid.*). In Vivekananda we may encounter the idea that the phenomena of empire and its ruins may have underlying resources of a positive nature. This is evident in Mishra's book, but the role of Vivekananda needs a more detailed analysis, considering his stature.

Swamiji remains the most famous spiritual leader and thinker in the 150th year of his birth, a figure studied by nearly all disciplines and discourses. The intriguing phenomenon is that his views are in the ethos, in the very milieu of world thought without a common knowledge that it was he who pioneered and formulated those views. A good example is *Religion for Atheists* by the stimulating thinker Alain de Botton. To the question why 'religions merit our attention', he says:

Religions merit our attention for their sheer conceptual ambition; for changing the world in a way that few secular institutions ever have. They have managed to combine theories about ethics and metaphysics with a practical involvement in education, fashion, politics, travel, history, initiation ceremonies, publishing, art and architecture—a range of interests which puts to shame the scope of the achievements of even the greatest and most influential secular governments and individuals in history. For those interested in the spread and impact of ideas, it is hard not to be mesmerised by examples of the most successful educational and intellectual movements the planet has ever witnessed.⁴

De Botton adds that his study is 'to examine aspects of religious life which contain insights that could fruitfully be applied to the problem of secular society' (*ibid.*). Obviously, the above are areas that Swamiji dealt with pragmatically.

What de Botton suggests is a fascinating return of religion but without any theological underpinnings. However, without a grounding in religious faith all the aspects de Botton cites are capable of behaviours inimical to social and economic well-being. For instance, in ethics, how do we determine the uses of science, technology, and medicine? Or, can we prevent world wars through atomic weapons? This is where



Vivekananda's achievement stands out in both sharp intellectual and intuitive brilliance, as well as in implementing the insights in tangible *institutional forms*. But the lynchpin was the experiential spirituality of his master Sri Ramakrishna.

Christopher Isherwood tells us that the 'calling of such a parliament was an historic act of liberalism. This was probably the first time in the history of the world that representatives of all the

major religions had been brought together in one place, with freedom to express one's religious beliefs. Paradoxically, the most genuinely liberal of the Parliament's organizers were the agnostics: for they were interested solely in promoting inter-religious tolerance.¹⁵ But there was also the possibility of promoting Christianity. The Vivekananda miracle was to meet these aims, and his very first address for religious tolerance received a thunderous applause that persisted throughout his mission—Swamiji's mission was *samarasya*, harmony among faiths.

We learn that the Parliament was to showcase 'Western Man's material progress, especially in science and technology'. Related areas that were expected to be dealt with varied: 'Woman's progress, the public press, medicine and surgery, temperance, commerce and finance, music, government and legal reforms, economic science' (*ibid.*). And the section on religions was inspired in the official language of the committee: 'Faith in a Divine Power has been, like the sun, a light-giving and fructifying potency in Man's intellectual and moral development' (xiii-iv).

Swamiji addressed almost all the themes appearing in the other sections of the parliament and his address contributed something original and enduringly functional to formulate. As for faith in a Divine Power and its sunny light-giving and fructifying potency, it was evident in the responses to Vivekananda. In the woman's reformatory his presence must have been like

a sunburst. The Divine Power had its nucleus in Sri Ramakrishna and also in the great spiritual teachers of the world, about whom Swamiji spoke with inwardness and intuition. In fact, a report about Swamiji says: 'There is combined in the Swami Vivekananda the learning of a university President, the dignity of an archbishop, with the grace and winsomeness of a free natural child.'⁶

Even before the parliament address Vivekananda's presence engineered a quantum leap. As Sister Gargi has noted, the daughter-in-law of Mrs Kate Tannatt Woods wrote: 'I never saw the Swami but have felt that I knew him from the many things I have heard of him in the Woods family. My husband ... spoke of him as ...of a real Christian gentleman. I have heard that he and Mahatma Gandhi were more Christlike than any the world has known.'⁷ Gandhi tried to see Swamiji but was not able to, and in one of his articles, he writes: 'It is impossible not to acknowledge the beauty and the sublimity of Hinduism expounded by Vivekananda and Sir S Radhakrishnan.'⁹ Reminiscent of Swamiji's attitude Gandhiji wrote: 'I make bold to say that in spite of the crudeness which one sees among the villagers, class considered, in all that is good in human nature they compare favourably with any villagers in the world' (*ibid.*).

From Archbishop to Christ

The uplift of the masses is a common concern, but in the case of Swamiji it should be by harmony of every kind: social, political, economic, and above all of faiths. In this respect Vivekananda embodied interfaith relations. This was concretely seen by J J Goodwin, Swamiji's devoted chronicler, who said: 'Shall I shock you very much if I tell you that Swamiji took the place of Christ for me?'⁹ And Sister Christine wrote: 'We have come just as we would go to

Jesus if he were still on earth and ask him to teach us' (3.143). We know Sri Ramakrishna absorbed the Christ Consciousness in himself by direct perception. As heir to that cosmic Consciousness that Sri Ramakrishna transmitted to Swamiji, it is entirely natural that followers should have teleological intimations of Christ in Vivekananda. It is in his discourse on Christ that Swamiji gave us one of the most important insights into the vexing question of what is Truth. The jesting Pilates, who do not wait for an answer, may consider Swamiji's insight as most acceptable—even when it is subject to debate. After all *tarka*, logic, is welcome in the context of studying the philosophy of Swamiji.

In a speech titled 'Christ the Messenger' Swamiji said: 'Humanity travels not from error to truth, but from truth to truth; it may be, if you like it better, from lower truth to higher truth but never from error to truth.'¹⁰ Creation, which though appearing chaotic is so coherent, can hardly or logically sustain rigid polarities. If there is evil, or what appears as evil, it must have a functional value. Take the apparent reason for the advent of an incarnation of God. A famous shloka in the Bhagavadgita says: 'When goodness grows weak / when evil increases', 'In every age I come back / To deliver the holy / To destroy the sin of the sinner / To establish righteousness.'¹¹ Good and evil are interlinked: if one thinks of evil as evil, it is the acceleration of evil that calls for the advent of the incarnation. Both together constitute truth, the lower and the higher, which are not at variance in their specific functions.

Swamiji's lower and higher truth finds mention in a massive study of the Gita by M Rangacharya, who says: 'The history of civilization is to make [man's] animality become more and more subservient to his humanity'.¹² Thus, 'our search for progress' has been 'in

favour of unselfishness and spirituality', against 'selfishness and sensuality' (*ibid.*). But what gets favoured is 'animality'. Quoting Swamiji, Rangacharya says:

The advance here, as it has been very well brought out by the Swami Vivekananda, is in fact not at all from error to truth or from unrighteousness to *righteousness*, but from less completely realised truth and goodness to more completely realised truth and goodness. ... The learned man of true wisdom and spiritual insight and power and purity is therefore called upon to bear this fact in mind in measuring the mental, moral, and spiritual level of those who are less blessed with wisdom than he is, himself (237).

The Hindu Sound

In their study of *The Hindu Sound*, William Corlett and John Moore draw our attention to the word 'shruti'. Shruti has the meaning of 'that which is heard or revealed'.¹³ 'Sruti is not some primitive system of chanting but ... it represents the fact that revelation through sound is an eternal and ever-present possibility for anyone who is minded to listen. It is recognition of this that persists today in the use by Indian traditions of much chanting and rhythmic sounds' (40). But then, as a result of 'personalization and popularization of the Vedic tradition', the essence of teaching got misinterpreted and lost (42). Hence the attempt to 'purify, redefine and retrieve' (43), say the authors. This gave rise to 'a second category of scripture called smriti (as distinct from Sruti) which means "reinterpretation" or "recollec-tion" and it is said that it arose through the necessity to "adapt to the changing conditions"' (*ibid.*).

Swamiji's 'discovery' of Sri Ramakrishna made him aware of the fact that he was

encountering a personified concretion of India's ancient spiritual traditions. He declared: 'Without studying Ramakrishna Paramahansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the Bhagavata and the other Puranas. His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India.'¹⁴

(*To be continued*)

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Imagining the Real

Amarendra Srivastava



ADVAITA VEDANTA DECLARIES that Brahman is non-dual and infinite. The absolute nature of the Reality has been experienced and taught by a galaxy of sages and saints since Vedic times. But our daily experience is just the opposite: we perceive ourselves as separate and this world as finite, diverse, and complex. All our physical and mental experiences are partial and fleeting. For this reason some doubts crop inside us: How did the One become the many? How does the infinite become finite? Advaita Vedanta declares that these questions are illogical, as the One has never really become the many. The One *appears* as many due to maya. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The one question is most difficult to grasp in understanding Advaita Vedanta philosophy, and the one question will be asked again and again and that will always remain: How has the Infinite, the Absolute, become the finite?'¹

The Cause of Diversity

Since we see and experience the many as real, we can try to understand a little of Advaita Vedanta's explanation of how the One appears as the many. First, what we see is only a partial reality. The universe is not just made up of matter and energy but has many vaster mental and spiritual dimensions that we are generally unaware of. Moreover, much of the sensations coming to our brain from outside are limited, and the brain does a selective pruning by taking in only what is essential. Thus the mind and the senses are seriously limited and as a result our view of 'reality' is partial.

Second, when Vedanta declares that the manifoldness is due to maya, the question of what is maya also comes up. Maya is somehow defined as time-space-causation, and everything in the universe is under its laws. Swamiji says: 'Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which

the Absolute is seen, and when It [Brahman] is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe' (ibid.). There is no time-space-causation in Brahman. Our minds and bodies and everything in the seen and unseen universe is made up of maya, the inscrutable power of Brahman that is 'neither existence nor non-existence nor partaking of both characters; neither same nor different nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.'²

Given the above description, do we have any hope in understanding correctly the Reality? All knowledge, including science, is the search for unity—the one force or matter from which everything has sprung. And science is making remarkable progress in this direction. There is an underlying unity to the diversity we see all around. This is progress on the physical side. There is progress on the mental side too, when intuitive philosophers and psychologists say that there is one mind and individual minds are parts of it. Vedanta also says that the distinction between matter and mind is one of degree and not of kind. The ideas of unity and oneness are accepted in today's world.

Vedanta presents a beautiful metaphor to explain this phenomenon of the One. Imagine we have a huge lump of clay. We can create innumerable pots out of it. Each pot would be different from other pots, yet each of them is nothing but clay. A pot comes out of clay, stays in and as clay, and goes back into clay. It was clay throughout, but when we perceive it as a pot, the idea of clay disappears. The 'pot-ness' appears and is only relatively real. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita: 'O descendant of Bharata, all beings remain unmanifest in the beginning; they become manifest in the middle. After death they certainly become unmanifest. What lamentation can there be with regard to them?'³

The Power of True Imagination

It is true that we experience the manifoldness, but deep down there is another indefinable experience of the unity of existence. This is intuitive and undeniable to all, and this is also the reason why so many religions and metaphysical systems have arisen in trying to define this vague feeling. Religions and metaphysical systems projected the feeling outside, while Vedanta rightly projected it inside. This vague feeling also manifests as the desire for immortality. Because it is deep, this Reality cannot be expressed in ordinary language or grasped through reasoning; yet it comes out in philosophy, poems, religious beliefs, and so on. There are innumerable ways to conceptualize and represent the One. Some of them may be totally different from one another. If we study them in isolation, they may even be contradictory to each other. This also explains why we have and need so many different beliefs. We have been imagining the infinite through the finite expressions and subjective lens. We need to imagine it more specifically, according to Vedantic teachings.

Consciousness, which is one and entrapped within the realms of individuality, struggles to become aware of its real nature as the ground of the many. All real human progress has been towards Consciousness, which is expressed in the world through the feeling of knowledge and love. Everything springs from this Consciousness, including imagination. Classical Vedanta makes one go through a long course of physical, mental, moral, intellectual, and spiritual disciplines to actualize the One. But we can take another route by trying to imagine the Real. Swamiji says: 'Some imaginations help break the bondage of the rest. The whole world is imagination, but one set of imaginations will cure another set.'⁴ He also says: 'Imagination is the gilded shadow of truth' (7.11).

While we imagine the metaphor of the lump of clay and pots, we have to keep certain things in mind. We generally imagine it as related to something material only, that is, clay and pots inert and devoid of any intelligence. However, Brahman is the infinite mass of Consciousness from where all names and forms arise, stay, and disappear. We have to imagine everything as arising from Consciousness, and then imagine Consciousness as light. We do not have to imagine a potter and all the other instruments, but in case we want to, then we can imagine that Brahman is the clay, the pot, the potter—as Personal God—and instruments. Therefore, we have the infinite sea of Consciousness out of which pots appear. Individual forms also reflect Consciousness.

Vedanta gives another beautiful metaphor that we can use in order to make the imagination better and sharper. Imagine that a pot is a human body, the water in it is the mind, and the reflection of the sun, Consciousness, in that water is the individual consciousness. We must become aware not just of the pot with water in it but of the sun as well as its reflection in the pot. This is the highest imagination of the highest state of what the Upanishads declare: '*Sarvam khalu idam brahma*; all this is Brahman.'⁵ Each one of us is reflecting Brahman but, as in real life, it is seen that the quality of reflection depends upon the quality of water. The clearer the water, the better the reflection is. As maya has the power of *avidya*, ignorance, each reflection starts believing that he or she is a pot. This is our ego. Maya makes us into pots, and throughout life we are trying to protect our 'existence'. Since a pot is limited and one's real nature is unlimited, one never obtains full satisfaction in life. At some point we are forced to consider if being a pot can really satisfy us. That is where the spiritual journey starts.

We are hypnotized by maya to see the many, so we have to start the process of 'de-hypnotization',

as Swamiji calls it. The Upanishads declare: 'This is to be attained through the mind indeed. There is no diversity here whatsoever. He who sees as though there is difference here, goes from death to death.'⁶ As we discard the illusion of separateness, our minds become purer, and the light of Consciousness is reflected more and more in it. We have been imagining false things in this world of maya; we need to replace that with the powerful imagination of the Reality. 'The highest imagination that can break all the links of the chain is that of the Personal God.'⁷ In the end we merge our imaginary separate existence in God, and everything we called the many merges into the One. This is the Absolute. This is freedom, which is the goal of Advaita Vedanta. ❀

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Doing is very good, but that comes from thinking. Little manifestations of energy through the muscles are called work. But where there is no thought, there will be no work. Fill the brain, therefore, with high thoughts, highest ideals, place them day and night before you, and out of that will come great work. Talk not about impurity, but say that we are pure. We have hypnotised ourselves into this thought that we are little, that we are born, and that we are going to die, and into a constant state of fear.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.86



Vivekananda: The Prophet of New India

S Srinivasachar

INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM is a long and tangled story. The tragedy and trauma of partition—of India and Pakistan—which preceded and accompanied that event on 15 August 1947, was the result of intransigence, hatred, and perfidy. Though true, this is only one facet of the story. Other factors, often overlooked, in our understanding of the long chain of events that preceded India's independence are of historical relevance; they help to present the story in its proper perspective.

Concept of Nation

In retrospect we can see in this phenomenon the faint outlines of a concept novel to India: the concept of nation. It travelled from Europe

and germinated in the social life of India. Today, India has made it the cornerstone of its political philosophy that religion should not mix with politics. In essence it means that the material advancement of people should not be linked with the religious faith of any section of the population. All those who inhabit the country by right of birth are equal in the eyes of the law and are entitled to equal opportunities for self-advancement and self-expression.

The people of India have woven the concepts of freedom, democracy, and secularism into their constitution. The concept of nation carries the concept of a functional democracy that does not envisage conflict between religion and

freedom. For good or evil, religion has often functioned as the spring of political activity. In its long civilizing history, religion has illumined the human spirit; it has equally corroded the human spirit and ossified society with constraints on the freedom to question. When the constraints of religion inhibit the urge for freedom and deny the fruits of reason and honest labour, great movements take birth in intellectual ferment. We can see now how things that happened in Europe five centuries ago would incarnate themselves with some variation in the religious and social atmosphere of nineteenth-century India. Three distinct phases are discernible in the evolution of the concept of nation in Europe. To begin with, there was the Renaissance, which saw a revival of art, literature, and philosophy. The Reformation followed this epoch, and Church dogmas came to be scrutinized and questioned. Dogmatism yielded to reformed faith. The third phase was the revolutionary phase, which shook the political foundations of the established order. The modern democratic system based on acceptance of human liberties, without limiting factors like colour, gender, or faith, has emerged with the triumph of reason and science. The scars and bloodstains of a long struggle are still visible in the nascent democracies of Asia, where social tensions, economic inequalities, and a variety of ethnic identities are struggling to make peace with the concept of nation.

For India the nineteenth century was the century of imperialism. The national spirit in Europe allied itself with science and technology, and from this combination sprang great economic, military, and political power centres. India, like many other Asian societies steeped in archaic world views, meekly surrendered to the gushing energy and the superior skills of Europe in the arts of war and peace. That was the century in

which Indians—Hindus and Muslims alike—suffered loss of freedom. That was also the century when the ruling elite, the British as well as intellectuals in Europe, rediscovered India's heritage. The irrelevance of religious archaic world views against the demands of the emerging times was becoming more and more evident.

At this stage we see the historic parting of the ways. There was the old Hindu society in disarray and in no mood to change. There was also a renascent India, groping for acceptance and eager to shake off the dust and grime of centuries. It was given to a tiny fraction of India, those products of the new educational system—paradoxically, a system introduced in India to enslave her still more—to awaken the subcontinent from slumber, serfdom, and shame. The faith of millions of people in the cultural values embedded in the folds and wrinkles of time had to be resurrected. They were of unquestionable value to India, and to a certain extent to humanity too. In short, Indians had to rediscover India. This was to be their first step before they could think of freedom. This meant that they had to undergo self-flagellation to punish themselves for what they had not attempted to do for centuries. Speaking in New York in January 1896 Swami Vivekananda called his countrymen to confess and vow: 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and this very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone. That which I created I can demolish. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves.'¹ Continuing this stirring admonition, he thundered: 'The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, thought, and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready

to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever' (ibid.).

A New Leader of a New Nation

It was natural that whoever was destined to lead had to combine unassailable scholarship, the courage and skill of a crusader, saintly indifference to the pleasures and pains of life, compassion for the suffering and the dispossessed, and above all, a burning sense of patriotism. The people of India had to be involved in deep introspection before they could face the challenges of emerging times. The cobwebs of superstition, empty rituals, and social evils that had accumulated over centuries of spiritual decadence had to be removed. The task was not easy, but it had to begin somehow, somewhere.

The cradle of the new awakening was Bengal, the earliest province to succumb to English authority and also the first to introduce the new educational system. Those sixty-six years between the birth of Sri Ramakrishna in 1836 and the *mahasamadhi* of Swami Vivekananda in 1902 were pregnant with new ideas and critical appraisals of India's contemporary situation. Dayananda Saraswati's Arya Samaj movement, started in 1875, had tried to cleanse Hinduism of the ills of idolatry and pleaded for a return to the purity of Vedic culture. Earlier, Raja Ram Mohun Roy had started the Brahmo Samaj to reassert the Upanishadic philosophy of monotheism and advocated reforms in education and social life. Various other evils that had crept into society were strongly opposed by Keshabchandra Sen, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, Rabindranath Tagore, and a host of other men in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and elsewhere. It was in this age of awakening

that Vivekananda lived and worked. It was an age of critical appraisal. A new middleclass, products of the new education, was born. In December 1885, out Vivekananda was wearing himself away with his packed schedule of speeches and discourses in the US, leading politicians acquainted with English, from all parts of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras Presidencies, assembled in Bombay for the first session of the Indian National Congress. The seed of the freedom movement was sown. Vivekananda remained untouched by active politics. It is not that he disdained political activity, but he was more concerned with India's spiritual awakening. In a Bengali article contributed by him to the *Udbodhan* in March 1899, he touched on this aspect of freedom: 'On one side, new India is saying, "What the Western nations do is surely good, otherwise how did they become so great?" On the other side, old India is saying, "The flash of lightning is intensely bright, but only for a moment; look out, boys, it is dazzling your eyes. Beware!"' (4.477).

To him freedom meant much more than political independence. He wrote: 'India will be raised not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit' (4.352). He sought to feel the pulse of this spirit over the length and breadth of his motherland. He wandered as an ascetic and trod the soil of India from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari. He drank and bathed in its sacred waters, saw the vulgar display of wealth in the palaces of princes while common people grovelled in poverty, illiteracy, and superstition. He witnessed the plight of widows, the curse of social inequality, the limitations of dry scholastic learning, the lethargy and pessimism that gripped millions in thraldom. He resented the vicious tirades by missionaries against everything Indian, their distorted and cynical views about Hindu philosophy, and the scriptures held sacred by the people.

Vivekananda's mind was in a whirl. There was so much to encounter, so much to rebuild, and so much more to create before India would be able to rise to its natural stature. His heart filled with pain when he heard unwarranted and thoughtless criticism of his people, their religion and customs. There was indeed something wrong, the Indian mind had to be cleansed and society had to be reformed. The thought that the West had conquered the East with so much ease drew his attention to the negative aspects of contemporary Indians—passivity, intellectual isolation, and lack of pride and drive. He realized that indeed India had lessons to learn from the West, while the West, steeped in material affluence and arrogance, needed in turn to be upbraided for what it lacked—a holistic approach to life. India had the capacity to offer the spiritual balm, but the world knew little of this country, its religion, philosophy, and customs. To most of the world India was known as a British colony, a slave country whose people deserved to be enslaved. India was the land of Maharajas, elephants, tigers, and snake charmers. The thought that five thousand years of its heritage lay humbled and smothered by a Western power hurt him deeply. However, he did not hate the British. In his reply to the address presented to him by the citizens of Calcutta, after his return from a sojourn in England, he observed:

No one ever landed on English soil with more hatred in his heart for a race than I did for the English, and on this platform are present English friends who can bear witness to the fact; but the more I lived among them and saw how the machine was working—the English national life—and mixed with them, I found where the heartbeat of the nation was, and the more I loved them. There is none among you here present, my brothers, who loves the English people more than I do now (3.310).

We see the true greatness of this Indian patriot—a true predecessor of Mahatma Gandhi—whose passion for revolt against British rule was not stained by hatred for the Englishman. What he did not like was the pernicious system that had brought disgrace and poverty to India. He admired the English for their love of freedom, their indomitable energy, and patriotism. Vivekananda's supreme concern was to salvage India's soul, make it pulse to the rhythm of life so that someday, not too far away, Indians could hold their heads high and tell the world that its culture does not remain as antiques displayed in museums. In less than forty years of life Vivekananda vowed to accomplish one great goal: to save India. The rest, he knew, would follow.

Vivekananda's Reforming Zeal

To Vivekananda, the political and economic consequences of British imperialism appeared a lesser evil and less damaging than the onslaught on India's self-esteem and pride in her spiritual heritage. And to awaken India's true soul Vivekananda's ideas were beyond the understanding of even the reform movements of the nineteenth century. In an interview with the *Madras Times* in February 1897 he said: 'I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses' (5.222). The great thing is to have faith in oneself, even before faith in God. He also stressed the importance of *shraddha*: 'What makes one man great and another weak and low is this Shraddha. My Master used to say, he who thinks himself weak will become weak, and that is true. This Shraddha must enter into you. Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this Shraddha, because they believe in their muscles, and if you believe in your spirit, how much more will it work!' (3.319).

His objection against the reformers was that they were nibbling at the edges of the problem: 'We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement. Checking a little the constant looking back to the past, we want that expansive vision infinitely projected forward; and we want—that intense spirit of activity (Rajas) which will flow through our every vein, from head to foot' (4.404). We see his remarkable insight into the character of his fellow men, which has all along been at the root of India's weakness. In an interview in Madras in 1897 he said:

It is absolutely necessary for you, instead of frittering away your energy and often talking of idle nonsense, to learn from the Englishman the idea of prompt obedience to leaders, the absence of jealousy, the indomitable perseverance and the undying faith in himself. As soon as he selects a leader for a work, the Englishman sticks to him through thick and thin and obeys him. Here in India, everybody wants to become a leader, and there is nobody to obey. Everyone should learn to obey before he can command. There is no end to our jealousies; and the more important the Hindu, the more jealous he is. Until this absence of jealousy and obedience to leaders are learnt by the Hindu, there will be no power or organisation (5.216).

Vivekananda saw where India lagged behind and why. In an address at Madurai he said: 'Let us be as progressive as any nation that ever existed, and at the same time as faithful and conservative towards our traditions as Hindus alone know how to be' (3.174).

Vivekananda visualized freedom in its widest sense. He did not tinker with the idea by confining freedom to politics. He looked far into India's future as deeply as he looked into her past.

Endowed with the inner vision of a prophet and the intensity of compassion for the low and the poor in his country, he said:

Let her [India] arise—out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them only half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy (7.327).

In one of his letters, he said: 'The past was great no doubt, but I sincerely believe that the future will be more glorious still' (9.531).

Indian women were to him mothers of heroes, thinkers, scholars, artists, and workers. With moving emphasis he pleaded in these words: 'Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them' (6.115). This was his clarion call to the women of India: 'I would say exactly what I say to the men. Believe in India and in our Indian faith. Be strong and hopeful and unashamed, and remember that with something to take, Hindus have immeasurably more to give than any other people in the world' (5.232). In a letter he expressed: 'We want both men and women. There is no distinction of sex in the soul. It won't do merely to call Shri Ramakrishna an Incarnation, you must manifest power. ... We want thousands of men and thousands of women who will spread like

wild fire from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from the North Pole to the South Pole—all over the world' (6.267).

Marie Louise Burke observes: 'Deep forces such as guide the destiny of nations and civilizations were certainly the invisible, compelling power behind his Western visit.'² His mission was to touch the souls of people with fire. He combined his love for his country's spiritual heritage with the fiery patriotism of a frontline soldier who would not settle for anything less than freedom for everyone. To him India's freedom had profound significance for the future of humanity. If we wish to call it his dream, it was the dream of an awakened man, not of a man who lay in slumber. He envisioned India's future in the uplift of the masses through education and culture. He said:

Teach the masses in the vernaculars, give them ideas; they will get information, but something more is necessary; give them culture. Until you give them that, there can be no permanence in the raised condition of the masses. There will be another caste created, having the advantage of the Sanskrit language, which will quickly get above the rest and rule them all the same. The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition is to study Sanskrit, and this fighting and writing and frothing against the higher castes is in vain, it does no good, and it creates fight and quarrel, and this race, unfortunately already divided, is going to be divided more and more. The only way to bring about the levelling of caste is to appropriate the culture, the education which is the strength of the higher castes.³

He foresaw the future of India in terms of a spiritual renewal through religion in its purer form. 'I may declare it to you,' he said in a speech in Lahore, 'that I belong to no party

and to no sect. They [religions] are all great and glorious to me, I love them all, and all my life I have been attempting to find what is good and true in them' (3.368).

Vivekananda founded a mission that was apolitical and remains so to this day. He felt the chill and ignominy of subjection. He also saw and admired the superior skills that the more adventurous, braver, and more disciplined West had demonstrated. He sought, by his words and deeds, to inject a new life, a new awakening in his countrymen. This he tried to do not by inciting his countrymen to revolt against the British, but by building the solid foundations of a newly awakened society, proud, united, self-reliant, and brave. His message to a resurgent India still rings through the passage of a century. They combine the powers of the intellect and the throbbing of a heart soaked in compassion. To quote his stirring words: 'Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, "I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother." Say, "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother"' (4.480).

We see in these words the quintessence of his life's endeavours, the bright flame of hope and renewal in the pervasive conditions of decline and despair. Despite the differences in religious faith, language, and customs, Vivekananda made Indians feel that they shared a common destiny and that its foundation rested in unity, discipline, courage, and spirit of service.



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Life and Death

Prof. Kaulir Kisor Chatterjee

IT IS NOW ACCEPTED by most physicists that the universe originated around 13.7 billion years ago through a single infinitely dense and hot point known as the Big Bang. That point was the beginning of this universe and time. Death for everyone is terrifying, but if we look at this phenomenon from the scientific angle, we will not be so overwhelmed by it, as death is part of the mighty processes of life.

Physical and Chemical Beginnings

After the Big Bang the primordial 'universe' was in an electrically charged state called plasma, in which particles crisscrossed at incredibly high speeds and collided. Under these conditions the first atoms formed were mainly those of hydrogen, some of which were converted to its heavier forms of deuterium and helium. Small amounts of lithium and beryllium were also formed. Hydrogen, deuterium, and helium constitute the elements of nuclear fusion or thermonuclear energy. A series of fusions among hydrogen, deuterium, and helium followed—much the same way as happens when a hydrogen bomb is exploded—eventually giving rise to newer and heavier elements like carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sulphur, phosphorus, calcium, iron, nickel, uranium, and so on. In some of them there was imbued a new form of energy called radioactivity, while in others the primary forms of energy, namely thermal and mechanical, interacted with matter and produced other forms of energy, cosmic energies, which are still not yet fully identified.

Matter and gravity go together, so atoms floating as cosmic dust had their own fields of

gravity. Some matter formed the first batch of stars, which later exploded scattering hydrogen and other heavier elements. All these elements in gaseous or plasmatic states coalesced together to form the next generation of stars, which grouped together forming different galaxies about a billion years after the Big Bang. We are made of this same stuff that blew up as supernovas. As of now, the universe consists of billions of galaxies, each of which consists of billions of stars, each with its own planets. Our Sun is one such star with a planetary system that includes the Earth—known as Earth as the only abode of life.

When the temperature came down considerably, it transformed the plasmatic state to gaseous; the atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorus started chemically combining with one another. Carbon and hydrogen combined into methane gas; nitrogen and hydrogen combined to form ammonia. The chemical combinations on Earth became structured thus:

(i) Hydrogen, methane, ammonia, and gaseous water bonded together to give rise to a number of amino acids essentially consisting of hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen in different permutations. The process took a few hundred million years, during which countless lightning strikes also helped significantly. Recent research suggests that this chemical combination might have taken place due to the collision of icy comets and meteorites with the Earth. These amino acids formed a thick layer—a chemical soup—on the ocean water, which had already been forming with the cooling of the primordial Earth.

(ii) Carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen combined in particular manners to form two types of carbohydrates: one with normal oxygen and another with less oxygen. The former is called 'ribose' and the latter, 'de-oxy-ribose'.

(iii) Nitrogen joined the ribose and de-oxy-ribose to form two varieties of what is called 'nucleoside'.

(iv) Nucleosides combined with phosphorus to form two varieties of 'nucleotide', which included both the ribose and the de-oxy-ribose types of carbohydrate. In due course a chain of nucleotides linked together to form two types of nucleic acids depending on whether the carbohydrate component of the nucleotide was ribose or de-oxy-ribose. The nucleic acid containing ribose carbohydrate is called 'ribonucleic acid' (RNA) and that containing de-oxy-ribose carbohydrate is called 'deoxyribonucleic acid' (DNA). The DNA is a complex large molecule having the shape of a long chain, which is organized in the form of a convoluted circle to form what

is known as 'chromosome'. This DNA chain in a chromosome is, however, not a uniform assemblage of nucleotides. Their number range from 200 to 200,000 pairs, and they group together in different manners to form different segments in the DNA chain. Each such segment actually denotes a code, somewhat like a bar code printed on a product sold in a store. A product's bar code with its specific length, width of individual bars, and specific intervals between successive bars indicates the product's unique characteristics, including the price, and the slightest variation in even one of these parameters will indicate a completely different product. Similarly, the different manners in which the nucleotides group in different segments of DNA denote different codes, which are actually 'genetic codes'. Each of the segments of a DNA containing a code is called 'gene'.

(v) In a parallel series of very complex chemical combinations, a few amino-acids in the original chemical soup joined together in different patterns, to finally yield a family of organic



substances called 'peptides'. Permutations and combinations among groups of these peptides formed different molecules of what is called 'polypeptide' or 'protein'.

Life energy

The genetic codes in a gene actually contain instructions to the amino acids and the peptides about the manner in which they should combine to form a particular kind of protein in a cell. One protein molecule could be different from another depending on the types and numbers of joining together peptides. There is no limit to the varieties of proteins that can be formed—so far, more than 100,000 varieties have been identified and isolated, and these proteins are important players in different functions of living organisms, from simple physical to highly complex ones like moving, speaking, thinking, imagining, and so forth! Ultimately, the chromosomes, containing the DNA molecules along with the genes and genetic instructions, the RNA molecules, and the protein molecules represent the final constituents of a life-forming cell—not yet a living cell. It is possible to recreate the chemical processes even in a laboratory.

What happened after this stage is still a mystery. We know that something happened, which could make it possible for a gene to pass its genetic instruction to the RNA and thus trigger the process of replication of the original protein contained in a cell. Once a cell memorized the process, it went on unstoppably replicating itself. This was the best way it could ensure its survival—the interaction between a form of energy and a gene is necessary for the chain of reproduction to proceed. Somehow these cells became 'living'.

In the context of the origin of life forms, some form of energy—or some other thing or circumstances—transformed a cell into 'life'. Physicists

have been exploring the different forms of energy together with their source and nature. Immediately after the Big Bang the manifest energy was a combination of intense heat and motion in the plasma. The properties of that primordial plasma—they still exist in the stars, including our Sun—have not been fully understood. It is known that some subatomic particles were moving chaotically at great speeds and colliding with other particles to form new particles, and that an unknown number of cosmic rays—alpha, beta, gamma, X-rays, and so on—were shooting out. The origin of radioactivity is also not fully understood. The three cosmic rays are called alpha, beta, and gamma. It is possible that the origin of radioactivity lies in the primordial plasma and may have something to do with cosmic rays—it is responsible for producing intense heat in nuclear reactors and some of the geothermal energy sources.

The physicists have mathematically proved that beyond the known energy there are some unknown energy they call 'dark energy'. This dark energy comprises about 70 per cent of the observed universe and is responsible for overcoming the force of gravity and for making the universe expand faster. There is also the chemical energy, which came into play in the universe when the intensity of the heat declined sufficiently and the fusion process of combination among particles gave way to chemical processes. This energy in combination with some unknown cosmic energies may be responsible for activating the genes and the genetic codes, somewhat like electrical energy activating a computer virus. Some call it 'vital energy', but we will refer to it as 'life energy'. This may be akin to what Indian philosophy calls *prana*, vital force, which according to Swami Vivekananda is 'the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe'.¹

This life energy is not a single form of energy but a combination of many unknown ones. Cosmic energy is incident all the time on all forms of matter, and are called *akasha* in Indian philosophy, which is 'the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe' (ibid.). It is well-known that, when mechanical energy is incident on one side of a wafer of silica or quartz, electrical energy is emitted from the other side and vice versa. This phenomenon, called piezoelectricity, is used in quartz clocks. Similarly, certain other materials show pyroelectricity, that is heat-electricity-heat transformation. A few other materials show photoelectric emission. A living being also works all the time in this manner. Let us consider the incident energy as the primary energy and emitted energy as the secondary energy. It can be surmised that all the time primary energies are incident on the cells of a body, interacting with the DNA, gene, RNA, and the protein molecules. As a result of this interaction various kinds of secondary energy are emitted from the cells of a body and new cells are produced through self-replication. These emitted secondary energies conjoin with external primary energies and become primary energies striking the new cells. Thus the process keeps getting more and more complex, giving rise to more and more complex proteins and cells—enzymes, hormones, neurochemicals, and so on. This conjoining and breaking up of energy within a body is going on all the time.

Unity of life

According to traditional bio-scientists, all objects are classified into two broad groups: living and non-living. As is understood, all living organisms—the tiniest single-celled bacteria, insects, reptiles, plants, birds, or mammals—must have the ability to reproduce and continue the chain of life. On the other hand, non-living objects are those that lack this ability. But this distinction

between living and non-living based solely on the criterion of reproduction was challenged by Dr Jagadish Bose in the late nineteenth century. He laid emphasis on the criterion of response to external stimuli and showed that even the atoms of even metals responded to stimuli just like plants and animals do. Besides, in the Upanishads the unity of life without any boundary was philosophized, and an old Sufi proverb goes thus: 'God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in the animals and awakens in man'.¹²

From the moment of creation onwards two broad processes for combining particles to form new ones have been taking effect: fusion at the subatomic level and chemical bonding at the atomic level. Because of the fusion processes all the elements formed after the gases cooled down to liquid and solid states. Chemical bonding resulted in the formation of various inorganic and organic compounds as well as chromosomes, RNA, and protein molecules capable of self-reproduction. It is a continuous process without any distinct boundary, initiated by the dynamics of thermal energy. As the intensity of heat declined, chemical process started branching off in various directions from the main trunk of the tree of creation—the metaphor of creation as a tree is also found in the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavadgita* as *urdhva-mula*, with roots up.

The metals and other elements were characterized by their response to stimuli from certain kinds of external energy, for instance, electricity. Down the line, more and more attributes got added—asexual reproduction, sexual reproduction, mobility, emotions, speech, thoughts and so on—but essentially there is a continuity from the root to the tip of the tree. This is the long and the short of the concept of 'unity of life' perceived by ancient sages and philosophers of India and much later theorized by a section of scientists.

Dynamics of Life

Swamiji said: 'Unity in variety is the plan of creation.'³ Unity of life does not signify that life is static. As the universe is dynamic, so are all its contents, including life forms. The evolution of life is therefore a continuous process, an endeavour to attain stability from instability or from chaos to cosmos. Evolution is taking place along the main path of non-reproducing life—the metals and other elements—and along the branch of reproducing forms of life as well.

A number of metals are unstable and are changing continuously, either from one element to another or from one isotope to another. Some of the elements, although apparently stable at the beginning, do undergo transformation due to some cosmic energy or chemical process. The point is that the 'inanimate' elements also undergo evolution, which is going along the main trunk of the tree of life.

Reproducing creatures are often referred to as living beings, and we use these terms for the sake of familiarity, distinguishing them at the same time from the metals and other elements that are also 'living'.

There is no certainty when the first creature capable of self-replication was formed, when the main trunk of the tree of life branched off. The DNA, with the help of genes and their genetic codes, could replicate proteins. But for reproducing the entire cell it would be necessary to repetitively replicate the RNA as well as the genetic codes. For the self-replication of a cell raw materials must be utilized, which were available in the atmosphere, rocks, and oceans. Oceans were formed on the Earth around 4.3 billion years ago.

Around 3.35 billion years ago, about 950 million years after the formation of the Earth, a kind of simple microbe—bacterium—with a single cell and without any covering membrane—called prokaryote—somehow came into

existence. Stephen Hawking considers that this has happened by pure chance,⁴ but such 'chances' are high probabilities in a chaotic environment in which all the particles are moving erratically at great speeds and collisions among them are taking place all the time. Geological evidences have revealed that these bacteria were capable of moving in their milieu. There was practically no oxygen in the Earth's atmosphere at that time, and these bacteria obtained the raw materials or food sourced from the hydrogen sulphide that was plenty in the atmosphere.

This single-cell bacterium was an imperfectly developed cell, inasmuch as it contained no DNA and hence no gene. Somehow, on the way, only the ribose type of carbohydrate was formed, and the cell contained only RNA and protein. The RNA managed the function of the DNA, albeit inefficiently, and only simple proteins with very limited functions could be replicated. In the process the RNA could also replicate itself forming a duplicate cell within the original one. But since it was a single cell, and there was no room for two cells within it, the new cell separated from the old one and formed two cells out of one. Thus, the chain of multiplication began and it has gone on in geometrical progression. In this reproduction process there is no union of two individual organisms, so it is called 'asexual reproduction'. The simple protein inhibited its functions to only reproduction and slithering a little on the ocean's mud floor.

(To be concluded)

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Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: Two Teachings or One?

Arpita Mitra

(Continued from the previous issue)

Sri Ramakrishna on Duty and Philanthropy

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S STANCE on philanthropy also differed according to the context and the case in question. We have different cases as examples. He evaluated Vidyasagar as having genuine sattvic compassion, but not being aware that God lies hidden within his heart. He very much appreciated Vidyasagar's endeavours, while only making some qualifications. In the case of Shambhu Mallick, whose fiery devotion he now and then praised, Sri Ramakrishna felt that after having engaged so much in work, he should now turn towards God. The emphasis of Sri Ramakrishna's advice to him is quite clear in relevant conversations.⁶³ There was the third case of Krishnadas Pal, whom the Master found to be of a totally rajasic temperament and having no real inner substance. Krishnadas Pal's statement that a person's duty was to do good to the world was countered by Sri Ramakrishna: 'Is the world such a small thing that you think you can help it?' (605). Sri Ramakrishna did the same in the case of the Brahmo devotee, albeit with more compassionate consideration and elaborate exposition of the whole matter (142).

On the other hand, there is the instance of the ascetic Gauri-ma, whom he prepares for a life of service. The Master opined that Gauri-ma had performed sufficient spiritual austerities and acquired great spiritual power, and now this

power had to be put to the use of the uplift of Indian women whose condition was very poor and painful.⁶⁴ Sri Ramakrishna maintained repeatedly that some do good to the world even after attaining God, as they do it under God's command, and that God brings some perfected souls to this earth for the welfare of humankind.

The Master, in fact, positively acknowledged the importance of philanthropy: firstly, as a value—compassion; secondly, as an obligation—to spend money on service; and thirdly, as a means of reaching God. Once, while discussing the plight of the people affected in the Damodar flood, the Holy Mother asked one of her lay disciples to do good to the world.⁶⁵

What is generally projected as Sri Ramakrishna's low opinion of philanthropy is a distortion of the real picture. Statements like 'He thought Pandit Ishvar Candra Vidyasagar ... was merely wasting time in trying to reform society'⁶⁶ presents in a distorted light, what actually transpired in a distorted light with the projection of the mind of the scholar in question. The episode, as recorded in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, is:

(To Vidyasagar): The activities that you are engaged in are good. It is very good if you can perform them in a selfless spirit, renouncing egotism, giving up the idea that you are the doer. Through such action one develops love and devotion to God, and ultimately realizes

Him. ... By these philanthropic activities you are really doing good to yourself. If you can do them disinterestedly, your mind will become pure and you will develop love of God. As soon as you have that love you will realize Him. Man cannot really help the world. God alone does that. ... The man who works for others, without any selfish motive, really does good to himself.⁶⁷

Again: 'The activities that Vidyasagar is engaged in are good. Charity is very noble' (267). Such statements demonstrate the positive light in which Sri Ramakrishna appreciated Vidyasagar's efforts—far from thinking that he 'was merely wasting time'.

Among the glories of true knowledge, like love of God and renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna also counted compassion. Apart from being a quality of great value in itself, for both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, there is an affirmative spiritual function of compassion as well. Work done for others in a spirit of total selflessness and non-attachment to the fruits, without any idea of being a doer, purifies the mind. Love for God naturally grows in a pure mind, and when such love has grown, one is not far from attaining God. Sri Ramakrishna stated:

Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then through His grace, one realizes Him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to him as I am talking to you (109).

Remember that daya, compassion, and maya, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' towards one's relatives. ... Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings. Maya also comes from God. Through maya God makes one serve

one's relatives. ... Maya keeps us in ignorance and entangles us in the world, whereas daya makes our hearts pure and gradually unties our bonds. God cannot be realized without purity of heart (161).

Your [Vidyasagar's] activities are inspired by sattva. Though they are rajasic, they are influenced by sattva. Compassion springs from sattva. Though work for the good of others belongs to rajas, yet this rajas has sattva for its basis and is not harmful. Suka and other sages cherished compassion in their minds to give people religious instruction, to teach them about God. You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit. Their activities are not selfless (101).

Thus the Master lays the dynamics of work, the three *gunas*, and God-realization. Is it still possible to argue that he was against philanthropy? He points out that the three *gunas* are three robbers that hinder final liberation (218–9), but he repeatedly mentions that God cannot be realized without the development of *sattva*, and that *sattva* begets *bhakti* (250). The path to the Infinite necessarily goes by way of *sattva*. Therefore, Swamiji only echoes the Master when he says that evil has to be first counteracted by good, and then one has to move beyond both.

Following the theories of Mortimer Ostow, who considers mysticism 'a result of the same psychic mechanism as psychosis' and believes that 'a psychotic individual finds his intrapsychic, personal, or social reality unacceptable', Sil concludes that this 'explains, at least partly, why Ramakrishna's teachings were so antisocial or at least asocial and the man so devoid of social conscience or consciousness'.⁶⁸ What makes Sil think that Sri Ramakrishna was 'antisocial' or 'asocial' and bereft of social

conscience is not clear. We know that he exhorted Keshabchandra Sen and other householder devotees with families not to abandon their dependant wives and children: 'If you disappear altogether in the river of bhakti, then what will be the fate of those behind the screen [family]?'⁶⁹ Numerous times did he speak of the necessity of householder devotees to spend money judiciously, not for enjoyment but for the upkeep of their families and for the service of holy men, the poor, and the destitute. Sri Ramakrishna had spoken both on duties towards the family as well as on those towards society.

He had spoken of the householder's debts to the gods, ancestors, rishis, parents (424), and to wife and children (156). He was even irritated with a certain Ramprasanna for being busy procuring opium and milk for a hatha yogi while his aged mother did not have enough to eat and had to walk to the market to buy groceries (425). He once recounted: 'Hazra doesn't inquire about his family. His son said to Ramlal: "Please ask father to come home. We shall not ask anything of him." ... Hazra's mother said to Ramlal: "Please ask Pratap to come home just once"' (573). After giving the examples of Sri Chaitanya and the rishi Narada, he gave his own example, where he had almost made up his mind to settle in Vrindavan, but came back to Calcutta forthwith when he was reminded of his aged mother. He had said to himself: 'My devotion to God will take to its wings if I have to worry about my mother. I would rather live with her. Then I shall have peace of mind and be able to meditate on God' (574).

His were no hollow didactic injunctions. A model character to emulate, Sri Ramakrishna performed these in his own life, be it in his duty towards his mother or towards his wife. Apart from his devotion to his mother and his

extremely caring behaviour towards his wife, he even looked after the latter's material wants. In spite of the fact that he hardly knew how to look after himself, could not even touch money, and on different occasions had refused monetary assistance from people, before giving up the mortal body he had provided for the upkeep of his wife by assigning a monthly allowance that she was to receive on his passing away.⁷⁰ His life is an object-lesson for humankind to follow.

A lesser-known incident may also be recounted here. During the last days of the Master at Cossipore, at the time of the chariot festival of Jagannath in 1886, Swami Ramakrishnanda, who was attending to the Master, was not willing to leave him alone, but the latter insisted that he go to the festival. The swami came back with a small paring knife to cut lemons for the Master, which he purchased for only two pice. The Master was very happy to see that he had bought something from there without being asked. He said: 'You should not fail to visit such festivals and make some purchase, however small. Poor people prepare so many things on these special occasions and bring them to the fair for sale with the hope of earning something.'⁷¹

In support of his argument, Sil continues that Sri Ramakrishna 'did not approve of working for a living' and cites the instance of how aggrieved he was to hear the news of Nitya Niranjan Ghosh [later Swami Niranjanananda] taking up an employment.⁷² The link between his alleged 'antisocial'-ness or 'asocial'-ness and his disapproval of working in this particular case is, once again, not logically established. Firstly, it is not as a general principle that Sri Ramakrishna did not approve of working for a living. For those who had families to look after, he also praised the advantages of having money,

provided it was put to proper use. He, in fact, held it a prime duty to ensure the upkeep of dependants. In the specific case cited above he said that it was Nirajan's duty to fend for his old mother. But the reason for his reservation in this case was that he had noticed this employment to have a negative impact on Nirajan's otherwise pure and stainless character. The Master had specifically selected young God-oriented minds for a future life of renunciation and was preparing them for it.

Lastly, Beckerlegge has pointed out that owing to intense spiritual sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna's own body was not in a state to engage

in systematic acts of service. Therefore, he 'depended more upon opportunities for service to humanity presenting themselves to him than upon actively seeking out such opportunities as a priority for spiritual growth.'⁷³ But Swami Premananda notes:

Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of compassion. There was no limit to his mercy. Once he went on a pilgrimage ... seeing the poverty and distress of the people [at Deoghar] the Master told Mathur: 'Feed and clothe these people well or else my pilgrimage ends here.' In spite of being criticized, the Master helped people. When he was suffering from the excruciating pain of cancer, every day he would wait for seekers of God to come. Sometimes he would look out at the street and say: 'What has happened? Nobody has come today.'⁷⁴

Spiritual service is also service; nay, it is service of the highest order.

Disciples and devotees have noted that Sri Ramakrishna was deeply moved at the sight of poverty and destitution and that he at times even lamented that given the condition of his own body, he could not do enough for the alleviation of human suffering. One should keep in mind that Sri Ramakrishna's case cannot be compared with anybody else's. In his situation these acts sprang from God-realization and were not a mere means of spiritual growth. He was veritably Swamiji's 'highest man', one who is beyond all bondage. In the words of the Holy Mother,



he was the embodied form of *shuddha-sattva*, pure *sattva*, and as such systematic worldly activity would be markedly less in such manifestations. One day, while revealing his identity to his close devotees, Sri Ramakrishna said referring to himself: 'It is the fullest manifestation of Satchidananda; but this time the Divine Power is manifested through the glory of *sattva*'.⁷⁵

In one of his lectures Swamiji mentions the following:

The highest men ... leave their ideas to the world; they put forth no claims for themselves and establish no schools or systems in their name. Their whole nature shrinks from such a thing. They are the pure Sattvikas, who can never make any stir, but only melt down in love. ... The highest men cannot work for in them there is no attachment. Those whose whole soul is gone into the Self, those whose desires are confined in the Self, who have become ever associated with the Self, for them there is no work. Such are indeed the highest of mankind; but apart from them every one else has to work.⁷⁶

Conclusion

It may be concluded that often the teachings of the Master and his foremost disciple are compared by (i) taking words and terms—*vijnana*, Brahman, Shakti for example—and the absence of these as the guiding factor, instead of an analysis of concepts and ideas behind these terms; (ii) pitting several concepts as mutually exclusive opposites—*jnana* and *bhakti*, *Advaita* and *vijnana*; (iii) conflating and equating concepts—*Advaita Vedanta* and *jnana-marga*; (iv) overlooking the complexity of different meanings in which the same word is used in different contexts—*vichara*, discernment, and *karma*; (v) not taking into account the immediate context of enunciation of the teachings—the addressee in the case of Sri Ramakrishna—and

the overall corpus of teachings, especially in the case of Swamiji, in whom an explication or a resolution of an apparent contradiction may lie in a different lecture.

Swami Vivekananda is actually Sri Ramakrishna all over, only put in a different language. The latter had already declared that among all his disciples 'Naren would be the one who would understand him most fully'.⁷⁷ This paper tried to demonstrate that one misses the way if one tries to analyse Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through preconceived categories, instead of examining their teachings on their own terms, in their totality, and in their context. Their teachings symbolize broad liberality of mind—the mother prepares different dishes of the same fish to suit the stomach of her different children. Therefore, both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda gave broad options to humanity, keeping in mind the specificity of the modern age. This liberality is not a superimposition, nor does it compromise with the foundational principle that God has verily become everything. We may enjoy God according to our individual aptitudes of mind, but not by losing sight of this basic principle or trying to reduce the Infinite to only one finite form.

Arguments like 'Sri Ramakrishna preached a kind of withdrawal from karma and *jnana*',⁷⁸ that he had 'a negative work ethic', that he had a low opinion of philanthropy and was 'antisocial' or 'asocial'; that Swamiji had a 'philosophical slant towards *gyan yoga*',⁷⁹ that he put *jnana* over *bhakti* and was closer to Acharya Shankara than to his Master,⁸⁰ or that Swamiji 'achieved a tour-de-force which apparently inverted much of his master's teaching',⁸¹ do not hold good in the light of the complexity of the reality that this paper has tried to present.

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(References on page 259)

Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the December 2013 issue)

PEOPLE WILL GREATLY LOVE one whom God loves. If God becomes displeased with someone, everyone will become displeased with that person. The whole creation is under his will. No one has the strength to move against his will.

You are a sadhu. You call upon God. You have renounced worldly pleasures for God. That is why people help you, giving you food and money. Now if you do not repeat the name of God and become a true sadhu, you will have to suffer. A sadhu who cheats, loses this world and the next. See how this play of *mahamaya* makes one forget all about the goal! Being a sadhu, one should engage oneself in devotional and spiritual practices getting drowned in the name of God. Instead, one starts cheating others! Such a person has forgotten every ideal for which one left his hearth and home! Such is the effect of maya! That is why one needs to pray to God, 'Oh Lord, let your maya not delude me.' In the Gita, Bhagavan says: 'None can escape the clutches of my maya; but for one who takes refuge in me, he will be saved. I will free him from my maya.' There is therefore no rescue without God's grace.

Even until the moment of our death, we cannot trust ourselves. If one can remain steady until death, one will be saved. A person thinks: 'I shall stay upright, I shall stay pure.' But such is the play of *mahamaya* that perhaps she churns everything up. One cannot even understand in the least when she has cast her bad maya upon

him. Without her grace there is no rescue from this maya. One alone can remain pure whom she keeps pure while alive.

One who has nobody and nothing in this world will surely call upon God. What else shall one do? But if one who has everything, lacking no wealth, friends, happiness, or luxury becomes restless for God, such a person should be praised. The Master used to say: 'One who has nobody will tend to a cat staying busy day and night with it.' See the play of maya! If one wished, one could have called upon God, but such desire does not even arise. Such is the impact of maya! If God's grace does not dawn, there is nothing that can rescue one from the hand of maya. As it is God's maya, God can easily remove it by a mere wish. One must pray to God to escape its hand. There is no other way.

Sri Krishna went to Vidura's house. Offering hymns, Vidura started praising him highly. Sri Krishna said: 'You can praise me with hymns but please feed me something now.' Renouncing the royal dishes of Duryodhana, Sri Krishna ate Vidura's simple meal cooked out of broken rice. His compassion is limitless. Vidura used to eat alms after offering them to God. There is a colloquial reference to 'Vidura's broken rice and husk.' Removing Vidura's doubt, Sri Krishna said, 'I am God.' In order to teach humanity, Sri Krishna rejected the royal dishes and ate the alms. He revealed how God accepts whatever anyone has offered with devotion. To find a devotee like Vidura is difficult.

If one calls upon God sincerely, God surely makes one realize him. He is bound to give such a person the right understanding. Unless God helps humankind to comprehend him, from where would they obtain the capacity of knowing him? God is beyond the reach of the human intellect. If one calls upon God, he reveals himself out of his kindness. That is nothing but his grace.

God listens to the devotee's prayer. If one calls upon God guilelessly, without crookedness, he listens. By pretence one person may escape another. But God is the indweller; no motives can be hidden from him. God showers his grace on one who gives up every pretence and takes refuge directly in him.

What spiritual waves arose in earlier days! In one area, the Salvation Army was lecturing. Over there the Brahmo Samaj was expounding. In another place Sri Chaitanya's followers were singing and dancing. And on this side, the Master's group was gathering. One day a vast concourse of people attended a lecture of Keshab Sen. The next day Kali Christian spoke at the Beadon Garden. The following day a discourse of the itinerant Swami Krishnananda left no room for even one more listener. Then too, there were the scriptural explanations of Shashadhar Tarkachudamani. Mr Booth and Mr Alcott and countless such persons came at that time. There was no end to the number of meetings, convocations, and lectures! There was discussion, debate, and dispute among children, elders, and youth, about religion at home, at the office, and in the streets. What an astounding phenomenon it was. In that flood of spirituality every corner was deluged. How can I make you understand what it was like? But see how God's chakra, wheel, [turns]. All of these sects and denominations are now disappearing. Their strength has died out. And the Master's followers, whom no one had even

known at that time, have now covered the globe. In one of Swamiji's lectures [at the Chicago Parliament of Religions] people of the whole world came to know about the Master. What a wonder! God's wheel of dharma turned in that direction! What no one could have imagined became a fact.

Surely God's special grace is bestowed on humanity when he appears in this world as an avatara. In this way he reveals his own spiritual nature. Is it a matter of ordinary compassion? People are searching here and there asking, 'Where is God? Where is God?' Still they cannot find him. How much suffering they undergo to reach him! Yet that very God comes down in a human form giving humans the chance to love and worship him. Is it a matter of insignificant compassion?

One day I went to Girish babu. He was seated. As soon as I arrived he exclaimed: 'Brother Latu, I clearly see the Master seated under the tree there.' Girish babu became fully absorbed in Sri Ramakrishna towards the latter part of his life. Now you understand the situation. By God's grace, what a transformation came over his life!

The Compassion of a True Guru

One should not disobey the words of the *sadguru*, true guru. It will bring great harm to do so. Who is the *sadguru*? He is one who has realized God. He is not someone ordinary. By the grace of the *sadguru*, one attains the power of the forefathers as well as the moon and at last the sun. Bhishma, for example, attained the power of the sun.

Can just anyone and everyone become a guru? He alone who has realized God can be a guru. The guru offers his teachings only after observing the attitude of the disciples. He never destroys the inner bent of their spiritual moods. The guru helps to intensify the disciple's attitude. He does only what will help the disciple progress. He never speaks words to diminish the

disciple's attitude nor to create a doubt, since a disciple whose attitude is demeaned will suffer a great loss and cannot progress much. Such a guru is very rare.

The Master had such unsolicited compassion towards Ram babu. He used to tell him: 'Ram, your family belongs to me; it is not yours.'

A guru can tell his disciple whatever he considers proper. He knows what will bring his [the disciple's] welfare. The disciple will try his best to follow the instruction. He should never entertain any doubt about his guru. Spirituality never comes to one who doubts his guru. For this reason, one should not select any ordinary person for his guru; one should only accept a guru after great consideration. How shall a guru who cannot bring good to himself, bring any good to his disciple? If the guru is blind, the disciple will be blind as well. In such a case, both having doubts in their minds, they both will surely fall; neither can progress. That is why the Master used to say: 'Accept a guru only after testing and sounding him.' He also used to say: 'Just as the guru watches a disciple day and night, the disciple also should watch the guru day and night.'

Envy and aversion are everywhere. Such is the evil character of human beings that they indulge in envy and aversion whenever they come together. If by the grace of the guru that nature is removed, one can progress on the spiritual path. The grace of the guru is the only salvation: '*Guroh kripa hi kevalam, guroh kripa hi kevalam;* by the grace of the guru alone, by the grace of the guru alone.'

There are *diksha*, initiation, gurus and there are *shiksha*, those who teach, gurus. The *diksha*-guru is only one while *shiksha*-gurus may be many. The *sadguru* gives the mantra in one's heart; the others give the mantra in one's ear. Only a very fortunate person can attain a *sadguru*. By the grace of the *sadguru*, one attains the

vision of one's Chosen Ideal as well as ecstatic love, devotion, and renunciation. The Avadhuta had twenty four gurus—all of them were *shiksha*-gurus: a crane, a hunter, a honey bee, and so on—all these were *shiksha* gurus. Just as a crane sitting silent and motionless with its attention riveted on the fish instantly catches it the moment it approaches, so does a spiritual aspirant keep the target steadily fixed on God rejecting all distractions. A similar lesson may be learned from the hunter. And as the honey bee will sit nowhere else but on the flower and suck nothing else but the honey, exactly so the aspirant thinks of nothing other than God, he will work only for God, speak only of him, and renounce everything but him. Such a discerning person gleans instruction from all humans and animals. Humankind can gain some knowledge or other from everyone.

Ego and Doubt

Spirituality is nothing more than getting rid of the ego. Due to their egos, people cannot understand what God is. Arjuna was a hero and a great devotee. Yet even being very near to Sri Krishna, he doubted him. What then will be the condition of an ordinary person! Sri Krishna removed Arjuna's doubt by thrusting him into work.

Parashurama used to say: 'I am God. There is no one above me.' Taking a human form, Bhagavan Ramachandra showed him that there is a God above him. Don't be egoistic. Such qualities cannot stand with him. He does not endure anyone's pride. That is why his name is Madhusudana, the destroyer of pride.

It is difficult to assess how many doubts come on the spiritual journey. After much effort one may have developed a little faith when something happens that makes one's faith unsteady. See the situation! There are so many religious people who will disturb your faith if you go near them. Suppose after much labour you have

developed a little faith. If you go to such persons thinking them to be good religious people, they will give such sermons as to cause doubts to rise. See the danger! Those who are genuine will never do such things. Rather, they will say such words to you that will make your faith stronger.

It is wrong to suddenly think someone is guilty, because he or she may not be guilty at all. If one is innocent, it will come as a relief. If one is not, there is no help. If you cause an innocent person to suffer, you yourself will have to suffer. Until you get specific proof, you should not doubt anyone. Suspicion is very bad as it brings separation. That is why I say that you should first see where the fault exists, then find out the culprit.

You people think, 'Let people see me.' After developing a small amount of devotion, you instantly think, 'Let people watch me.' What will they find in you? Have you become Swami Vivekananda? Do you possess that fathomless devotion and endless knowledge that others should look at you? After practising only a little devotion and meditation your ego puffs up.

Holy Company

If one remains always in the company of the holy, desires disappear and one's mind becomes pure. Reading holy texts and associating with holy people are the same. They bring the same result if one has the power to understand. For one lacking the power to understand, whether one associates with the holy or reads holy texts, nothing at all happens. But the association of the holy will never go in vain; in time it will surely yield good results. Why can't he understand? It is because he lacks celibacy. He utterly lacks self-restraint; how could he understand? Celibacy is required. The power of perception does not develop in one who lacks celibacy and self-control.

There are many benefits of holy company. By associating with the holy, one's mind gets

uplifted, one can understand God and one's spiritual work becomes easy. Because Yudhishthira obtained holy company, he attained victory in this world and the next.

(To be continued)

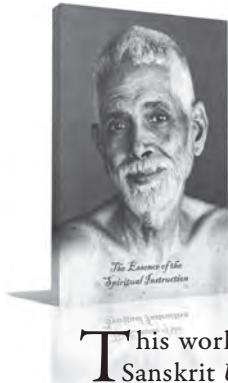
(Continued from page 255)

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



The Essence of the Spiritual Instruction

Translated with commentary
by Nome

Society of Abidance in Truth, 1834
Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060,
USA. Website: www.satravana.org.
2011. xii + 60 pp. Price not mentioned.

This work is the English translation of the Sanskrit *Upadesha Saram*, the essence of the spiritual teachings and a precise formulation of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's practical guidance to spiritual seekers. The text offers divine inspiration to lead a peaceful satisfied life. *Upadesha Saram* is treated as a scripture. It was chanted before Bhagavan daily, together with the Vedas, and continues to be chanted today before his shrine.

The 'Introduction' of the book precedes the thirty verses of the text. It elaborately tells about the various translations of this work, the approach chosen by the translator, and the differences between the Tamil and English versions. The genesis of the text *Upadesha Saram* is presented here very briefly. The poet Muruganar, Bhagavan's devotee, composed a long narrative poem in which Lord Shiva instructed a group of rishis on the right means to moksha. Muruganar stopped composing at the climax of the poem, when Lord Shiva imparts the highest knowledge to the rishis, and entreated Bhagavan to put the sublime teaching in his own words. Thus was born *Upadesha Undiyar* in Tamil language. Subsequently, complying to the request of devotees, Bhagavan also composed these thirty verses in Sanskrit, Telugu, and Malayalam, known as *Upadesha Saram*.

Although many fine translations and commentaries have been written on this sacred text, Nome has taken up a slightly different

approach. Each verse is treated in the light of Self-knowledge. The explanation of each verse is given as ten succinct, pithy points, each verse being considered distinct, as well as conjoined to the preceding or succeeding verses. The enumeration is for ease of reading and does not represent an ascending or descending order. The author has attempted to provide a very literal translation; alternative translations are provided for words and phrases in the notes immediately following each verse and, in some cases, alternative translations for the entire verse are also presented.

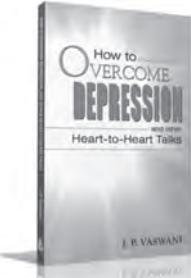
This work deals with various paths of yoga, like karma, bhakti, raja, and jnana, and Bhagavan brings out the essence and explanation of each of these four paths. He shows how aspirants grow and mature from preliminary practices into the higher knowledge, culminating in the path of Self-enquiry leading to Self-realization. Verse 29 declares that 'This Self is the Reality. This is the Truth. This realization leaves nothing else to be realized. This is absolute happiness.'

The first fifteen verses of the teaching consist of the foundational practices of the yogas of karma, bhakti, mantra, and prana, while the remaining fifteen verses are devoted to the path of Self-enquiry. An appendix that contains the entire Sanskrit text with transliteration is included for ease of recitation.

This classic would surely appeal to any person interested in the philosophy of existence. The author, who teaches Advaita Vedanta in the Society of Abidance in Truth, California, deserves our gratitude for his clarity of presentation. Reflection on these verses enables us to dwell deep within ourselves.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

Professor of Plant Physiology,
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How to Overcome Depression and other Heart-to-Heart Talks

J P Vaswani

Sterling Publishers, A-59, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-II, New Delhi 110 020. Website: www.sterlingpublishers.com. 2011. vi + 146 pp. ₹ 195.

Revered dada J P Vaswani, the author of this remarkable book, is the spiritual heir of Sadhu Vaswani and heads the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, with headquarters at Pune, India. Dada Vaswani has been tirelessly working towards spreading the fragrance of the Sanatana Dharma, and in this context several study centres and ashrams worldwide have come up. Dadaji also has scores of valuable books to his credit, the present one being another wonderful flower in his garden of spiritual literature.

The book has been divided into fifteen chapters that duly explain the topics related to the title given to each chapter. The overall reasons behind depression and ways to overcome it have been provided in a lucid manner, so that even ordinary folks can learn and assimilate. The chapter 'How to Overcome Depression?' deals with ways other than medication to check the symptoms of depression, like the understanding that as God is always with us, there is no real cause to feel lonely. Several anecdotes and real life stories are given in support of the theories propounded by Dadaji, which makes the reading an adventurous affair.

According to Dadaji, what one should do to ideally get over depression is to 'pray to God, meditate on His creation, meditate on nature, walk around a beautiful park or up a hillock, travel to a scenic spot or a hill station, admire God's beautiful creation, examine a flower, a petal, a stem, a blade of grass. And marvel at the beauty and perfection of nature. Every flower, every petal, every stem, is a model of perfection and holds the secrets of nature' (8). He also writes that 'God is protecting us, God is leading us, God is guiding us, God is watching us, God is watching over us; then why should we worry? Why should we fear anything? We must make prayer a habit. Unlike all other habits, it should become integral to our daily living' (9).

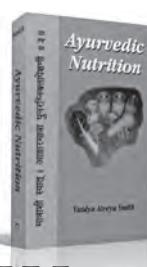
The chapter 'For Thy Sake' again goes on to

prove that being selfless and pure in thought helps us lead a depression-free life. Moreover, we should have full faith in the Almighty and let things happen according to his wishes. Several short stories of faith and resilience on the Supreme are illustrated with examples from the lives of Mahatma Gandhi, Romain Rolland, and others to bring home the relevance of surrender to the Almighty's will.

Spiritual stories and anecdotes abound in the chapters 'Life Is Storm, Let Us Make It Sweet', 'The Transformation of a Tawaif', 'Beware of Maya', among others. Dadaji has taken lessons from all the spiritual greats since time immemorial and has put them in this book. We find references to Kabirdasji, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mira Bai, Guru Nanak, and more. The last chapter of the book is worth referring to by a seeker of Truth, 'Miracles still Do Happen'. A genuine seeker should never give up hope in the existence of the all merciful Lord and His benevolence towards the seeker, somewhat similar to Swami Vivekananda's assertion that 'light must come'. According to Dadaji, 'The best antidote to worry is faith. To dispel your worry, all you need to do is chant the Name Divine. Just sing, *Re Mann Tu Kyun Chinta Kare? Dhyan Hari Ka Kyun Na Dhare!*—Why do you worry? Just chant the Name Divine' (136).

The book is an asset and one is bound to be benefitted immensely by following its teachings.

Sudesh Garg
Chandigarh



Ayurvedic Nutrition

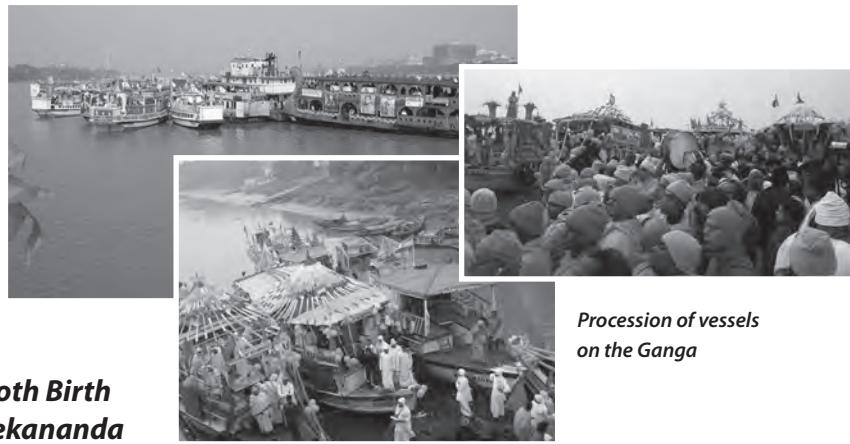
Vaidya Atreya Smith

Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mldb.com. 2011. xxv + 338 pp. ₹ 395.

Written in a lucid and humorous style, this book gives personalized nutrition plans for the three Ayurvedic types—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Explaining the proper way of eating, tending of the stomach fire, *jataragni*, trends of dieting and food consumerism are denounced, while vegetarianism is advocated. This volume is indispensable to anyone who cares about nutrition.

PB

REPORTS



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, held the closing ceremony of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 12 January 2014. Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India; Smt Sonia Gandhi, UPA Chairperson; Sri A K Antony, Union Defence Minister; Smt Chandresh Kumari Katoch, Union Culture Minister; and Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, addressed the gathering.

The Government of West Bengal marked the conclusion of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary with a public function at Red Road, Kolkata, on 10 January. Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal; Swami Suhitananda, many other dignitaries, and about 25,000 students attended the programme, which included parade and cultural events.

Gujarat Ratha Yatra (procession with Vivekananda carriage), jointly organized by the centres in Gujarat and Gujarat Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad, was launched from Dharampur, Valsad district, on 12 January. About 6,500 tribal youths and a large number of dignitaries and devotees participated in the programme.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Headquarters:** The concluding programme of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration was held at Belur

Math from 13 to 31 January. On 13 January a procession on the Ganga was held, in which 35 specially decorated vessels with monastics and devotees on board sailed from Budge Budge to Kharda via Belur Math and Dakshineshwar. The procession was flagged off by Swami Smaranananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, formally inaugurated the programme on 19 January. On the same day Sri Subrata Mukherjee, Minister, Public Health Engineering and Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal, declared open the exhibition on 'National Integration through Arts and Crafts'. In the evening a classical dance performance, Shiva Nritya, was held. On 20 and 21 January classical music recitals were presented by renowned artistes. A Devotees' Convention was held on 25 and 26 January; an International Seminar on the 'Universal Significance of Swami Vivekananda's Life and Message in the Twenty-first Century' and a parliament of religions were held on 27 and 28 January; and a Youth Convention on 29 and 30 January. About 12,000 delegates besides 1,500 monks, nuns, patrons, General Committee members, and guests participated in each convention. The international seminar and the parliament of religions were attended by nearly 5,500 people. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji

Maharaj, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Suhitananda, Sri M K Narayanan, Governor of West Bengal; Sri Shekhar Dutt, Governor of Chhattisgarh; Smt Chandresh Kumari Katoch; Mamata Banerjee; Sri Jawhar Sircar, CEO, Prasar Bharati; and many other dignitaries spoke in the various sessions. Apart from the speeches, there were also several cultural programmes such as devotional music, classical dance, and tribal dance. On 31 January a laser show on Swamiji was presented. **Bagda:** Value education and personality development workshops at 10 educational institutions in Purulia district from November 2013 to January 2014, in which 2,137 people took part. **Bengaluru:** Interfaith meet on the subject 'World Peace and My Religion' on 5 January, in which about 900 people took part. **Barasat:** Concluding programme on 20 January comprising: (i) cultural competitions, in which 220 students of 20 schools took part, and (ii) discourses and a film show on Swamiji attended by a large number of devotees. **Bhopal:** A classical music concert (vocal and instrumental) on 15 and 16 January attended by about 200 people. A district-level youth convention on 17 January, in which 285 youths participated. **Chennai Math:** An exhibition on the special activities of the centre in connection with Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary was inaugurated on 12 January. A public meeting comprising speeches, bhajans, and a video presentation on 12 January attended by more than 2,000 people. **Cherrapunji:** 10 youth conventions from 31 December 2013 to 22 January 2014, in which 5,082 youths from various districts of Meghalaya participated. **Cooch Behar:** A district-level youth convention on 19 January, in which about 950 students participated. **New Delhi:** A puppet show on Swamiji on 29

December 2013, watched by about 500 people. A musical mono-act performance on 4 January attended by nearly 700 people. On 6 January Swami Suhitananda inaugurated a night-shelter for the homeless at Rohini area in Delhi, built by the centre. A laser show on Swamiji at a sports complex in Delhi on 11 January watched by about 1,300 people. A value education workshop in Bhopal on 15 January, inaugurated by Sri Deepak Joshi, Minister for Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and attended by 100 principals and teachers. A flute recital on 18 January, attended by around 650 people.

Headquarters

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly built four-storey monks' quarters near the water treatment plant at Belur Math on 14 January, the sacred birthday of Swami Turiyananda.

The birthday (*tithi-puja*) of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated at Belur Math on 23 January. Thousands of devotees attended the celebration throughout the day. Cooked prasad was served to about 24,000 devotees.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, provided Vitamin A capsules to 1,869 underprivileged children of two schools in Sitapur district and free glasses to 52 children with refractory errors in January.

Swami Suhitananda unveiled a statue of Swami Vivekananda installed at the initiative of **Ramakrishna Math, Kamarpukur**, at Kamarpukur New Chatti on 3 January. He also inaugurated the newly built extensions to the dispensary building and primary school (*Vivek Vithi*) building of Kamarpukur centre on 3 January.

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, conducted a round-the-clock medical

camp during Makara Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 16 January. In all, 5,483 patients were treated, out of which 45 received indoor medical care. Besides, 150 blankets, 100 pieces of clothing, and 4,000 copies of religious books were distributed to pilgrims and monks.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasdwip, conducted a camp at the Gangasagar Mela area from 12 to 16 January. In all, 1,135 pilgrims were provided with free board and lodging at the camp and the ashrama. Besides, free meals were served to about 200 non-resident pilgrims daily. Discourses and devotional singing were also arranged in the camp.

On 22 January Mamata Banerjee inaugurated the renovated Roy Villa at **Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Educational and Cultural Centre, Darjeeling**, where Sister Nivedita had spent her last days, along with the language school and computer training unit in the presence of Sri Bimal Gurung, Chief Executive of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, and several other dignitaries. Swami Suhitananda presided over the function.

Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, has received Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award from the Government of India for raising the prestige of India by rendering commendable community service in that country. The award, comprising a citation and a medal, was handed over by Sri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India, at a function held in Delhi on 9 January.

Relief

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people. **Cooch Behar**: 182 saris and 118 dhotis on 27 January. **Jamtara**: 114 saris, 103 dhotis, and 217 towels on 29 November. **Medinipur**: 130 saris and 45 dhotis from 11 November to 5 January. **Narayanganj (Bangladesh)**: 200 T-shirts, 200 saris, and 100 dhotis in January. **Ponnampet**:

5,650 notebooks and 1,017 stationery sets (each set containing a pen, a pencil, a ruler, and an eraser) to 1,017 needy students from June to August 2013. **Porbandar**: 1,000 kg rice, 400 kg dal, 2,000 kg bajra (millet), 200 kg edible oil, 200 kg sugar, 50 kg tea, and 200 chaddars on 20 January. **Purulia**: 540 saris from 11 November to 3 January. **Sarisha**: 50 saris on 16 December. Ulsoor (Bengaluru): 2,000 saris from 3 to 15 January.

Economic Rehabilitation · **Antpur** centre distributed 6 sewing machines, 5 rickshaw vans, and 5 weaving sets to needy people on 17 December.

Disturbance Relief · From 9 to 20 January **Jessore (Bangladesh)** centre distributed 200 blankets, 1,000 sweaters, 180 saris, 200 lungis, 150 handis, and 1 sewing machine among families affected by the recent political disturbance in the country.

Refugee Relief · **Lucknow** centre continued relief work among the 44 families who are camping in Mobaiba area of Lucknow, having been uprooted from their homeland along the LOC in Baramulla district of Kashmir owing to hostile environment there. The centre distributed rice, dal, oil, salt, spices, tea, and sugar to these families in January.

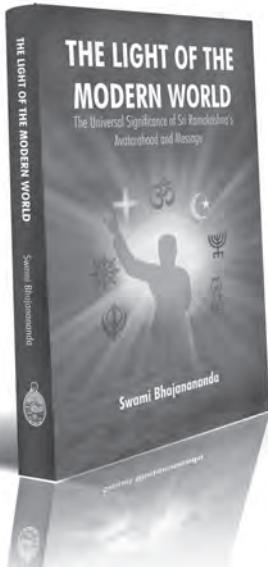
Winter Relief · The following centres distributed 11,404 blankets to the needy. **Antpur**: 730, 11 to 29 Dec. **Barasat**: 400, 1 to 29 Dec. **Chandigarh**: 410, 29 Oct. to 25 Dec. **Jaipur**: 400, 12 and 22 Dec. **Jalpaiguri**: 150, 22 Dec. **Jamshedpur**: 150, Oct. to Dec. **Kamarpukur**: 2,000, 13 Nov. to 23 Jan. **Kankurgachhi**: 150, 13 and 14 Jan. **Katihar**: 233, 21 and 28 Nov. **Khetri**: 60 in Jan. **Mayavati**: 150, 8 and 14 January. **Medinipur**: 650, 11 Nov. to 5 Jan. **Naora**: 1,000, 25 Dec. **Narayanganj (Bangladesh)**: 100 in Jan. **Narendrapur**: 650, 18 to 31 Dec. **Narottam Nagar**: 196 in Jan. **Ponnampet**: 900, 16 July to 31 Dec. **Puri Math**: 775, 28 Nov. to 12 Jan. **Purulia**: 400, 8 Nov. to 4 Jan. **Rahara**: 150, 28 to 30 Nov. **Sarisha**: 500, 11 and 16 Dec. **Silchar**: 400, 1 and 20 Dec. **Swamiji's Ancestral House**: 500 in Dec. **Taki**: 350, 5 Dec. to 15 Jan.

RR

Corrections · January 2014, p. 2; in shloka 3, line 1, read 'सुरागाक्षिमन्तं' for 'सरागाक्षिमन्तं' and in shloka 4, line 1, read 'स्वसूक्तिस्फुलिङ्गान्' for 'स्वसक्तिस्फुलिङ्गान्'.

The Light of the Modern World

—Swami Bhajanananda



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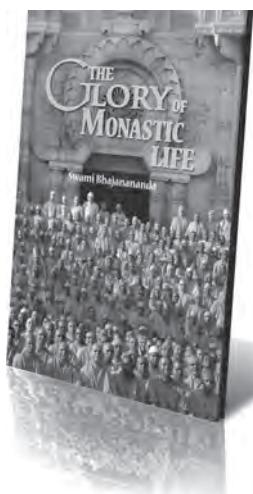
According to Swami Vivekananda, 'With the birth of Sri Ramakrishna the Golden Age has begun.' But today, for the generality of people, such an assertion may appear preposterous, with no sign of such a beginning visible anywhere. Who was Sri Ramakrishna? What was the purpose of his advent? Did he bring about a silent revolution, unseen on the surface?

This book skilfully deals with these issues, taking for its subject the Avatarahood of Sri Ramakrishna and its universal significance. In the course of his discussion the author presents the different facets of an Avatar and the universal relevance of his message. Many other spiritual topics too are dealt with, all of which go into the making of this impressive and inspiring work.

The Glory of Monastic Life

—Swami Bhajanananda

The present booklet keeps before the readers the glory of the monastic life. It discusses the traditional modes of monasticism and compares them with the modern monastic way of life as seen in the Ramakrishna Order. With the changing times, monasticism too has to grow and assume new forms to adapt to the new situations. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda brought about this change in the outward form of Indian monasticism without deviating from the eternal principles. This book gives an overview of monasticism in general, and the Ramakrishna monasticism in particular.



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‘FUTTEH BILLASS’, the residential palace of the erstwhile Raja of Khetri, is sanctified with the stay of Swami Vivekananda himself. Swamiji had spent considerable time within these grand old walls during his three visits to the kingdom of Khetri. It was from here, buoyed by the encouragement of his beloved disciple Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur, that he truly launched forth his missionary life. The palace building was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission by the last Raja of Khetri State in 1959. Since then the Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri has taken up the ardent task of preserving the memory of the great Swami by involving itself in various spiritual, cultural, as well as service activities in and around Khetri. However, the condition of this historic building is deteriorating with age. 150 long years of wind, rain and heat are slowly taking its toll of the grand structure. The time has come when serious attention must be given to restoring the former glory to this ‘Temple to the memory of Swami Vivekananda’. As a tribute to Swamiji on the occasion of his 150th Birth Anniversary, we have



decided to take up the renovation process of this historic edifice, which holds witness to a unique monk-king relationship. We have also decided to set up an attractive Museum, elucidating this almost-forgotten chapter in history.

We feel happy to inform you that the restoration work of the historic ‘Futteh Billass’ palace has been started by us from the 10th of July, 2011. The total expenditure towards this ambitious project comes to the tune of Rupees Six Crores, of which we are receiving Rupees Four Crores as grant from the Central and State Governments. For the balance amount of Rupees Two Crores, we solely depend on the beneficence of all you devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda. Brothers and Sisters, we feel that a contribution from you towards this noble project will be an outstanding tribute to this great Saint-Patriot-Philosopher on his 150th Birth Anniversary. All donations are exempt from Income Tax, under section 80G of the IT Act, 1961.

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